

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN



WILBUR NESBIT



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

50

X

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

JOHNNY THOMPSON'S STORY
OF THE EMIGGER

BY
WILBUR NESBIT

AUTHOR OF
"THE TRAIL TO BOYLAND"



NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

1906

Copyright, 1906, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

Published September, 1906.

JUL MAR

PS
3527
N 3654g

TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

1521062

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN



THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I

THE Emigger came to town last April on election-day, and he has been in our midst ever since. I was almost the first person he talked to after he got here, and he says I was the first person he saw that he liked. Most likely that was because I was polite and agreeable to him, and did my best to give him what information he wanted. When a boy intends to grow up to be an editor it pays him to be honest and pleasant with strangers.

There is a story in the Fourth Reader about a little boy who opened a gate for a strange old man, who afterwards died and left the boy a large estate, thus enabling the boy to live in affluence. Six months ago I would not have been able to write "affluence," or even to put quotation-marks before or behind it, but now that I have learned to set type and write per-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

sonal and local items for the weekly *Chronicle*, I have secured knowledge of a great many long words that will come in useful to me hereafter, in case I should decide to become a preacher, or maybe set up as a doctor. However, the chances are that I will continue in the profession of journalism, as I have adopted it. Squire Miller says people are more beholden to adopted children than they are to their own. He says it is because nobody blames you if you spoil your own children.

The Emigger says I ought to make a great editor, and he encourages me a great deal. If he knew that I am going to write the story of how he happened to come here, and of his adventures since he came, I know he would be happy, because he says so many people make the mistake of writing about things they don't know anything about. He says each person ought to choose a certain subject, and be the Hoyle for that. I asked him who Hoyle was, and he said he was a man who wrote a lengthy book on how to draw. But art is not my forte.

I was sitting in the editorial department of the *Chronicle* office when the Emigger came in. The editorial department is the space between the case of job-type and the pasting-table, and is where Mr. Bashford, the editor, sits when he

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

writes his pieces. Mr. Bashford is a fine man, but he says himself that his career was cut short through his inability to decide which was past and which was future. Before he came here he lived in Cincinnati, and he learned the printing trade there. I cannot quite understand what he means by not being able to distinguish between a past and a future, and the only explanation he makes is that some one told him there was a fine opening here for a young man, and that while he was looking for the opening somebody pushed him in. He is a little, skinny man, with kind of grassy-gray hair—the color of grass after we haven't had any rain all during the dog-days. He has a pug-nose and chews tobacco. Each of these characteristics is constant with him, although his hair is slowly falling out. He says the *Chronicle* makes a good living for him, and he could make a better one if he didn't have the dyspepsia or had some children. He says this because he has to trade out most of the advertisements. This goes all right with the clothing store and shoemakers, but he says the blacksmith is away ahead of him, and unless some one brings in a horse on subscription he can see where he is going to lose money on that advertisement.

Well, as I started to say, I was sitting in the

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

editorial department, while Mr. Bashford was up at the polls "watching the voice of the people going on the record," when the Emigger came in. He was a tall, black-haired man, with the kind of black eyes that look through you and seem to be studying the way the back of your coat is wrinkled. He had a long, black mustache that drooped just like Simon Legree's in the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* pictures, and before I knew it I was looking for a black-snake whip in his hand. But he didn't talk like Simon Legree at all. His voice was soft and gentle-like, and it dropped at the end of every sentence, and he never pronounced any r's. Some ways he talked like old Uncle Abijah Henderson, who has done our whitewashing ever since I can remember. But when the Emigger talked to you he didn't make you feel that he was going to offer to do the job for a quarter.

"What's going on here to-day?" he asked me, when he stepped into the office. I will not attempt to leave out the r's as he did, because I am not skilful enough in the use of the apostrophe.

"It is the town election," I told him, getting up and offering him my chair.

"Keep your seat, son," he said. "What might your first name be, anyway?"

"John."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“John who?”

“John Thompson?”

“Any connection of the Thompsons, of Virginia?”

He was leaning over the pasting-table and smiling at me as friendly as if he had known me all my life. I told him I didn't know whether we was any kin to the Virginia Thompsons or not, but that we had lots of relatives almost everywhere.

“It is a good name,” he said. “And so the election is going on, is it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Has there been any shooting yet?”

“No, sir. Why should there be?”

“Excuse me. I forgot where I was. You see, Johnny, down my way no election is allowed to progress until three o'clock in the afternoon without at least two shootings and maybe three or four stabbings to enliven the occasion.”

“We never have any shooting here, except when we shoot off the anvils after the returns come in,” I told him, and then I laughed, because I could see that he was joking with me.

“What I am looking for,” he said, “is an opening. I want to go into business.”

I told him about what Mr. Bashford said about the opening he found here, and he

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

laughed at that, and said he supposed he might be able to wriggle out if the opening didn't suit him. So I tried to think of anything that might interest him, but it seemed like everything was taken up. Then I remembered about old Henry Gillup having died.

"There's just one vacancy in this town," I explained, "and maybe that wouldn't suit you. Old Henry Gillup is dead."

"What about him? What business was he in?"

"He was the ragman. There's his wagon across the street."

The stranger frowned at me at first, but he saw that I did not mean to be impolite, so he turned and looked across the street where Gillup's rag-wagon stood under the shed, and then he laughed to himself, and pulled his slouch hat down over his eyes, and said, under his breath:

"Why not? Nobody ever would suspect me of being a ragman."

Then he turned around again and drummed with his fingers on the table, and asked me if I thought he could buy the rag-wagon and a team to pull it. We talked it over quite a while, until Mr. Bashford came in, and then the stranger talked with him about it, first introducing himself.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I am Mr. Asbury Dabney Colquhoun, late of Red Gap, Virginia, sir," he said to Mr. Bashford. Mr. Bashford shook hands with him and replied:

"I am honored by your acquaintance, Mr. Colquhoun—Colonel, I should say. I am Mr. Eli James Bashford, late of Cincinnati, Ohio."

"Might you be any connection of the Bashfords, of Virginia, sir?"

"Very probably I am," was the answer, and then they took up the rag-wagon matter, and Mr. Bashford explained how the wagon was for sale, and how an enterprising man, by doing some judicious advertising, would find this an unrivalled location for that line of trade.

"But couldn't he get along without the advertising?" asked the Emigger.

"He might get along, but not so well without it as with it."

"You see," said the Emigger, leaning over confidentially, "just now I am not overly anxious to get any too much publicity."

Mr. Bashford looked kind of funny at this, and the Emigger noticed his look and said:

"Oh, it isn't that. I haven't done anything to be ashamed of. You can take my word as a gentleman, sir, can you not?"

Mr. Bashford declared that his word was as good as his bond, and then the two of them

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

went over to old Mrs. Gillup's, and before they came back the Emigger had bought the wagon and the team and got a list of Mr. Gillup's customers.

I ought to have told a good while ago how we came to call Mr. Colquhoun "The Emigger." But I couldn't explain it until I told of his buying the rag-wagon, because it all came about through that. Mr. Bashford told me to gather up all the old books and papers in the office and give them to Mr. Colquhoun as a sign of good luck for the start of his business. Among the lot was a copy of an encyclopædia, and before I threw it into the bunch I looked through it. Mr. Colquhoun was sitting down talking with Mr. Bashford, and Mr. Colquhoun was telling how he happened to leave Virginia. It was very exciting. His father's grandfather and Colonel Tobe Sanger's grandfather traded mules away long ago, and Colonel Tobe Sanger's grandfather's mule kicked Mr. Colquhoun's grandfather, and so Mr. Colquhoun's grandfather said that it was a put-up job and shot at Colonel Tobe Sanger's grandfather. That started it, and from then on a Colquhoun and a Sanger couldn't meet without shooting at each other, and by-and-by they got to trying to meet each other, and shooting each other, until at last there wasn't any men left but Mr.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Colquhoun and young Pinkney Sanger. And finally, Mr. Colquhoun's mother just begged and prayed with him, and said she would never have another happy day unless he went away and stopped taking shots at young Sanger.

"I didn't like to go away," he said to Mr. Bashford, "at least not until I got another try at Pinkney. The last time we peppered at each other he spoiled a new hat of mine, and I nipped one of his ears, and I was calculating to make him symmetrical by nipping the other ear. But mother took on so that at last I gathered together what money I could and struck out, bringing up here, as you see."

"That was the only way to end the feud, unless you married a Sanger girl," said Mr. Bashford.

"There wasn't a girl in their family. Nothing to do but shoot, and not much fun about that of late," answered Mr. Colquhoun.

Just then I had come across the word *émigré*, which of course I could not pronounce, and I had been reading how it was the name of the folks that left France one time because of a war, and settled down in foreign countries until the trouble was over and they could go back to their homes.

"Then here's your definition," I said.

"Whose?" asked Mr. Bashford.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Mr. Colquhoun’s. He’s an emigger.” (That was the way I pronounced it then). “Emiggers are people who go away from home to keep out of trouble.”

They both looked at the book, and then looked at each other and laughed, and Mr. Bashford said the word was pronounced Amy Gray, but Mr. Colquhoun said, better let it stand the way I pronounced it, that Emigger was a better word than one of those prescription expressions, anyhow. So after that Mr. Bashford called him the Emigger just for fun, and to tease me as much as anything, and the joke got all over town, until at last the name stuck to Mr. Colquhoun.

II

THE Emigger got Mr. Bashford to let me off for a while in order to go around with him and get him acquainted with the roads and the people. He didn't really seem to care very much whether he bought any rags or paper or not. We would drive along for four or five miles sometimes without stopping anywhere, while he would be telling me stories about the fun he had in Virginia. I got to wishing I could have a feud with some one, and lay in wait for him or watch to keep him from lying in wait for me. The Emigger said it didn't make so much difference, though; that a boy was better off without feuds. He said no matter where a boy lived, that was the place where he would have the most fun of his life.

The first day I went with him I took him up to Miss Flora Beavers's house. She was my Sunday-school teacher, and was almost an old maid, but not quite. I guess she weighs about a hundred and sixty pounds, and she has

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

crinkly hair and a nice, round face, and she is plump and good-natured. She lived with her mother. Her father is dead. It was his funeral where they had the band from Kensington, and the Grand Army marched with their guns upside-down, because Mr. Beavers had been a captain in the army. Since he died, Miss Beavers had kept herself and her mother by taking subscriptions for papers and magazines, and I knew she would have a lot of old circulars and sample copies the Emigger could buy. When we turned into the lane from the road, the Emigger looked across the yard and said:

“There’s a fine swing over there.”

“That was a premium,” I said.

“A premium?”

“Yes. Miss Beavers got it for getting a hundred subscribers to the *Family Hearthstone*. She wants to sell it, because she says she is too heavy to swing in it.”

Mrs. Beavers met us at the door. She said Flora was busy just then writing out some subscription-blanks, but that she would be down pretty soon, and we should be seated and excuse her, as she had some work in the kitchen.

“Certainly, ma’am,” said the Emigger. “Pardon me, but are you any connection of the Beavers, of Virginia?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Mrs. Beavers didn't know but she might be, and the Emigger told a long story about Colonel Beaver and Major Beaver and Judge Beaver and how they fought the Revolutionary War. Then Mrs. Beavers went out, and we sat in the front-room waiting for Flora.

"That's a pretty centre-table," he said to me.

I told him it was a premium, and that the photograph album on it was another. And before he got over being surprised at that, I went on to show him the panel of kittens over the mantel and the yard of puppies and the imitation oil-painting of Washington crossing the Delaware and the three-piece parlor suit and the bookcase and the sets of Dickens and Shakespeare, and told him they were all premiums. Well, there never was a man so surprised.

"All premiums?"

"Yes, they are all premiums," Miss Beavers said, coming in with a laugh and shaking her finger at me. "I suppose Johnny has been telling you all about our house, and how I have furnished it with prizes I got for soliciting subscriptions."

The Emigger had got up and made her the finest bow I ever saw.

"Miss Beavers," he told her, "it certainly is a great compliment to you to have it known

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

that you are a woman of such energy and enterprise."

Then she laughed again and thanked him, and told him all about how she had made it a business to get subscribers for everything that was printed, and before long she took us out in the kitchen, where her mother was making pies, and showed us the cook-stove and the kitchen things that she had earned by taking subscribers for a cook-book. The Emigger was so interested in all she said, that finally I had to tell her what we had come for. She said she had a great lot of old sample papers, and would be glad to sell them, or give them to the Emigger if he would haul them away. But he bowed again, and said that business was business and he would pay for them. So she showed us where there was a stack of them out on the back porch.

When we were driving away she said, "Mr. Colquhoun, I get a great many of those samples, and expect I can keep you busy buying them."

"So much the better, Miss Beavers," he said. "The more you have of them, the oftener I can drive in."

And he cracked the whip and made old man Gillup's horses trot down the lane and out into the road faster than they ever had gone since they began pulling the rag-wagon.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

We went out the pike as far as the second cross-roads, then went over and come back to town by way of Porter's mills, stopping at Elijah Porter's for dinner. Elijah couldn't remember whether he was any kin to the Virginia Porters or not, but he had a cousin who had gone through Virginia once on a hunting-trip, and he told us all about that.

The Emigger got a good load of stuff that day, and hired me to work, that night, helping him pack it up to ship off to the junk dealers. He asked me all about Miss Beavers while we were stacking up her sample papers. Mr. Bashford came over to the barn while we were at work and asked the Emigger how he was getting along.

"Excellently," answered the Emigger. "There has been a strong demand for coffee-pots and quite a rush on dish-pans, and I have collected rags and papers of all kinds."

"Yes," Mr. Bashford said. "Lots of people around here only take the *Chronicle* to save the copies long enough to trade them for a flour-sifter."

It took me a good two weeks to pilot the Emigger over the country around here. We could have gone over the ground a good deal sooner, but he would talk with people as long as they would talk with him, and sometimes

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

we put in half a day at one place. It was the same way in town. There, though, the folks he met introduced him to others, and so much did not depend on me. He made great friends with Squire Miller. I think the reason he took such a fancy to the squire was that the squire is always playing tunes on a locust leaf under his tongue, except in winter. As the locust-trees were just in good leaf when the Emigger came to town, the squire was making up for lost time, and you could always tell when he was coming down street by the music he made. Nobody can quite catch on to how he does it. Lots of us boys have begged and begged him to show us, and he has told us how to hold the locust leaf on top of the tongue and just sort of whistle over it, but you can't make it work. When I do it, it only squeaks once or twice and then the leaf splits, but Squire Miller can put a leaf in his mouth and hold his lips kind of square set, and go around playing "ta, ta, ta-teety te ta" in a regular tune.

The Emigger tried it once or twice, but stopped because he said he couldn't play music and chew tobacco too.

III

AFTER I had gone to work again in the *Chronicle* office another stranger came to town. "Arthur Keene Branthorpe" was his name printed out in full on a little card that he handed to Mr. Bashford, and below his name it said, "Stage-Director and *Impresario*." He was in the business of getting up theatrical productions of his own play, "The Last Shot," for the benefit of the Sons of Veterans, by home talent. That was what he came here for, and Mr. Bashford told him if he couldn't go right down Main Street any day and pick out twenty of the best character-actors in the world without any make-up on them, he hadn't any right to be in the business. (Sometimes Mr. Bashford talks as if he didn't altogether like Plainville, even if he does run the Plainville *Chronicle*.) Mr. Branthorpe said that what he wanted was to get the young folks interested in the work and develop any latent talent there was.

He got Mr. Bashford to put in a write-up of him and his scheme, and then saw some of the

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Grand Army men and Sons of Veterans, and before the week was over "The Last Shot" was booming.

Mr. Branthorpe left a copy of the printed play with Mr. Bashford. It was about a man who went to the war, after telling his girl good-bye. That was in the first act. The Plainville Silver Cornet Band was to play "The Girl I Left Behind Me" real soft while the man was saying good-bye to the girl, and she was to cry, and at last he would kiss her and put his gun on his shoulder and walk away real slow. Then the next act showed a hospital, and the man had been wounded. The girl was there to nurse him, and there was another fellow, who really was a spy, but he was in love with the girl, too, and he told her that the man had been shot in the back while running away from the battle. Of course that made her mad at him, and it looked as if she was going to marry the other man. But in the last act the spy fellow was with the enemy, and it was the last battle of the war, and the man had got well and he fired the last shot of the war, and who did he kill but the spy. Then the girl was to come running to him right through the battle smoke, and all was well. Of course there were other people in the play. There was a funny Irishman who said "be jabers," and things

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

like that, and put on the general's uniform and was caught stealing chickens; and there was a darky servant who sang and danced. Then there were other men and women who all got married in the last act. It seemed funny to have all these women rush in on the battle-field, but, Mr. Bashford said, folks could do almost anything in a play. Mr. Branthorpe was to be the funny Irishman. The funny Irishman spoke the first words in the play, and was in it all the time, and he would be the last man to speak in the show, too. Branthorpe had bunchy, curly hair and wore fine clothes. Mr. Bashford made him pay in advance for the local notice.

There was a good deal of argument about who would play the part of the girl that told the man good-bye in the first act, but finally it was decided that Annie Davis should have the part. It seemed like it was made just for her. She was the prettiest girl in town. She had nice pink cheeks and blue eyes and hair that was almost yellow. And she had studied elocution. Fred Parker was to play the hero. George Horwick didn't like this, because he had been going with Annie for a good while, but Branthorpe said that as manager of the show he had the right to say who should take parts, and that his great experience fitted him

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to make proper selections. The only thing he would let George do was play the part of a sentinel over the hospital. Dave Miller, the squire's son, was to play the darky part, because he can sing real well, and Branthorpe said he would teach him how to dance a jig. Then the other parts were given out. Flora Beavers was to play the mother of the heroine, and some other women and girls were given places. The Sons of Veterans were formed into a company of soldiers to represent the army. I was to play the drummer-boy. They wanted the Emigger to play some part. Captain McDougal said it would be a noble act to invite him to appear in the drama, as it would show that hands were clasped across the bloody chasm. But the Emigger begged off, because he wouldn't have time to study up. Just the same he asked Miss Beavers if he might escort her to and from the rehearsals, so he was always there while we were practising. The show was to be given the middle of June, after school commencement was over and before wheat harvest began.

At first we only rehearsed every Wednesday night. I didn't have much rehearsing to do, so I could sit around and watch the others. We used the opera-house to rehearse in. We just had the stage lighted and one or two lights

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

out in the hall. Annie Davis learned her part before anybody else, and Branthorpe bragged a lot about her. He said she showed true dramatic talent, and would make a great emotional actress if she would go on the real stage.

“When you are at the head of your own company, Miss Davis,” he said to her, “I hope you will not forget that it was Arthur Keene Branthorpe who first predicted your success.”

I could see that George Horwick didn't like that, either. It wasn't so much what Branthorpe said as it was the way he said it. But Annie took it for the greatest compliment in the world, and blushed, and almost forgot what she had to say at the rehearsal the rest of the evening. When we were leaving, George Horwick walked up beside her to take her home, and Branthorpe walked up, too, and said, that as he was going the same way—he was boarding at Lancaster's — he would be pleased if they would permit him to accompany them. She told him certainly. George looked madder than ever.

Branthorpe walked home every night with Annie after that, and pretty soon George Horwick got so mad about it that he quit going home with her. She didn't seem to care. All the time at rehearsal, when she wasn't acting,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

she would be talking with Branthorpe, and I could hear him telling her about New York and Chicago and tours and audiences, and she would blush and say he was flattering her. But he would press his hand on his heart and say that he was speaking the solemn truth. The Emigger got to noticing them, too. Some way, he didn't like Branthorpe. He would sit on a chair back in one corner of the stage and keep his eyes on the actor all the time, chewing his mustache. Anyway, people were talking about the way the actor was running after her. He would be at her home during the daytime, often, to rehearse. But the funny Irishman in the play didn't have any acting to do with the heroine.

"The Last Shot" never was fired in Plainville. The Emigger spoiled the show. It happened just a week before the play was to be given. We had all met for a rehearsal. Emma Wallace, who played the part of the sister of the heroine, was going to sing a song in the show, and she was practising it, with Lizzie Collins playing the piece on the piano that had been borrowed. I was back on one side of the stage, behind a scene, and I heard some one talking on the other side of it. It was Branthorpe and Annie Davis. He said something about a great career that was open

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

for her if she would only leave this dead little place and take advantage of the opportunities that were open to one of her beauty and intellect. I couldn't hear what she said, she answered him so low.

"But you can slip away the night after the show is played," he said.

I could see his shadow on the scenery. He was real close to her and was talking fast.

"You can slip away," he said again.

"Oh, Mr. Branthorpe, do you mean I should run away from home?"

"Why not?" he asked. "Join me in Pittsburg and we will be married, and then I will star you in a great play."

She hung her head, or her shadow did, and whispered something. I didn't wait to hear any more. I ran across on my tiptoes to where the Emigger was and told him what I had heard. I never saw a man jump up as quick as he did. He sent his chair flying behind him and rushed across the stage, and Emma Wallace choked right off in the middle of her song, and everybody else ran up to see what was the matter. The Emigger ran back of the scenery, and there was a scuffle and some swear words, and he came out holding Branthorpe by the neck and shaking him like a rat.

"You get out of this town right away!" he

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

said. Then he let go of Branthorpe, and every one rushed up to them asking what was wrong.

"This man is trying to get Annie Davis to run away with him."

"You're a liar!" yelled Branthorpe.

The Emigger reached to his hip-pocket. Then a queer look came over his face, and he took his hand away from the pocket and walked up to the actor and shook him back and forth until his head wobbled like a rag.

"I ought to kill you for that," he said; "and maybe I'll be sorry some day that I didn't. But I'll give you a chance for your life. You get out of this town to-night."

Mr. Davis climbed up on the stage and went to Annie and told her to come on home with him. She was crying. Her father said it was what might have been expected of such wicked performances. The Emigger shook Branthorpe a little more and then let him go, and he hurried out. Everybody stayed to talk it over, and by the time the folks got started home some boys came in and said they had seen Branthorpe getting on the late train.

IV

THERE was considerable talk about the breaking up of the show, and some people criticised the Emigger, while others said he did just right. He only said he was sorry it happened, and they could take that any way they liked. Nobody knew what had become of Branthorpe. The Emigger got a letter from him saying he would get even, but didn't pay any attention to it. He just went ahead with his work as if nothing had happened.

One day Oscar Ferguson, who intends to be a great detective some time, came into the office. Oscar has a nickel-plated star he got with a certificate that he is a real detective from some company in New York, and he has a big revolver and a pair of handcuffs at his home. Marshal Smith says he will arrest Oscar if he carries the pistol or the handcuffs, but he can wear the star as long as he wants to. Oscar came in like he was walking on eggs and begun whispering to me before he had got around back of the pasting-table. I told him right

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

away that I didn't know any more about Mr. Colquhoun than anybody else did, and that if he was looking for clues he had come to the wrong place. So he looked kind of mad at me and turned around and went out, and when I was going home I saw him sitting in the barber-shop looking over the pictures in the *Police Gazette*.

There got to be so much of this questioning of me that I told the Emigger all about it, and it seemed to tickle him a lot. He said for me never to mind it, but just to tell them all I knew, and if there was anything I wanted to know to come and ask him; that there wasn't anything more than he had told me in the first place. He promised to take me 'coon hunting in the fall, too, and I concluded that he was the right kind of a man for a boy to be friends with. Ma and pa both liked him, for he had begun going to our church, and he sat in our pew. Mr. Davis has the pew in front of us, and the Beavers's pew is right across the aisle.

But the Emigger wasn't the only person in town that people were interested in. There was a lot of talk about Annie Davis. She and George Horwick had had a falling out about that rehearsal business and were not speaking any more. Annie went to the post-office every time the mail came in, and once or twice she

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

got letters from some one in Pittsburg and New York. Ida Kirkham, who clerks in the post-office, didn't know who the letters were from, but she noticed the post-marks on them. The sewing-circle met at our house one week to make clothes for the heathen, and they got so excited talking about the letters that Annie was getting that Ida Kirkham cut her hand with the scissors, and they tore a strip out of a sleeve that had been cut out for a heathen's shirt, to tie up her hand with. I told Mr. Bashford about it, and he said they ought to go right ahead and finish up the shirt and see if they couldn't find a one-armed heathen, or else cut an arm off of one right here at home and give the shirt to him or her as the case might be. Mr. Bashford got real excited about it. The Emigger was in the office at the time, and both of them talked pretty cross about the matter, until finally the Emigger said that once he knew a woman that lost her eyesight reading postal-cards in the post-office where she worked, and then they both got to laughing.

Just then old Ike Peters came in. Ike Peters is what Mr. Bashford calls "the before-taking exhibit" of Plainville. He says this because Ike is always reading medicine advertisements and almanacs, and then saying

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

that he has had the very symptoms the advertisements tell about. If a travelling patent-medicine man comes to town and sells his remedy from a buggy on the square at night, Ike is right in the front rank of the crowd, and always buys the first bottle, no matter what the medicine is to cure. If he didn't have false teeth he would let the travelling dentists pull them for nothing to exhibit their painless system. Mr. Bashford always saves the proofs of new medicine advertisements and gives them to Ike when he passes the office on his way home. Ike came in, as I said, just while we were talking about what Ida Kirkham had been saying. He was all excited.

"What's the matter, Ike?" Mr. Bashford asked him. "Got a new symptom now, or have you heard of some medicine you haven't taken?"

"Worse than that, Bashford," Ike said.

"Let a sample bottle fall and break before you took a dose out of it?"

"No. 'Tain't any joking matter. Haven't you heard the news?"

"There won't be any news until the *Chronicle* comes out."

"Yes there will. Annie Davis has run away."

"What? Annie Davis!"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

The Emigger jumped up at that and asked Peters how he knew it. Ike said that Mr. Davis had been to Marshal Smith's office to tell him that Annie was gone and that they didn't know what had become of her. They had gone up-stairs to call her to breakfast and found her room empty and a note pinned to her pillow saying good-bye to her folks, and telling them that she was sorry to leave them, but that she could not sacrifice her art although it broke her heart to sever home ties. The note said it would do them no good to try to find her as she would change her name, but that some day she would return and then they would see how they had misjudged her. The note was still damp with tears, Ike said; and Dr. Henderson had had to be called in because Mrs. Davis was in hysterics. Well, there was more excitement in town that day than there was the time some of the boys got old Uncle Abijah Henderson to drink a Sedlitz-powder in separate glasses on Sunday morning, and he ran into the Methodist church fizzing at the mouth like a soda-fountain and folks thought he had been bitten by a mad dog. Marshal Smith said the note Annie left was the only clew, and that the brakeman on the local said that he had noticed a girl answering her description get on the train from the side

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

opposite the station platform. They telegraphed a description of her everywhere, but it didn't do any good. The Emigger said if they would find Branthorpe he would bet they would find her, and the detectives in Cincinnati did try to look him up, but when they located him he swore he didn't know anything about the matter.

Oscar Ferguson came into the *Chronicle* office the last of that week and whispered to me that he was on the trail. I asked him what trail.

"Annie Davis," he said, with his finger held up as if to warn me to keep quiet.

I asked him what he meant, and he said:

"I've gained access to the Davis home"—Oscar talked just like the detectives do in stories—"and I got a copy of the note Annie left for her folks. Johnny, I believe there must be a hidden cipher in that note that will divulge the secret of her whereabouts."

"A cipher?" I asked him.

"Yes. That's the way people do when they want to let others find out after a long time where they have been or what they have done. It's something like a puzzle-picture, only instead of looking for a dog in the tree, or a chicken in the man's clothes, you must find out what letter to start with, then how many

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

letters to skip, and then where to go back to, and then go forward again so many letters, and so on until you have worked it all out, then you take the letters you have sifted out and they spell the thing you are looking for."

"I don't see any use of all that," I told him.

"But that's the way Bacon did when he wrote Shakespeare's plays, and lots and lots of those kings and queens in those times used to write letters in eipher. Why, they could write to some one and say they took their pen in hand to let you know they were in good health, and hoped you were enjoying the same, and that the prince was getting over the measles, and the princess was engaged to the king of some other country, and Sir Knight Somebody had ridden to London, and all that sort of thing, and if you knew how to work it you would find out that what they really wrote was that war was going to be declared a week from Tuesday morning, and the other fellow had better fill up his moat and get his portcullises oiled, or that the one who got the letter was to beware of an assassin."

"But Annie Davis didn't have anybody to declare war on," I said, and went on distributing type.

"I know, but she had a message to leave. Mark my words, there is a mystery in this that

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

nothing but me and time can unravel," Oscar said.

After that Oscar was the busiest boy in town. He would go around as cautiously as a cat, and he used to come into the office and scribble all over the copy-paper, writing down the alphabet and putting figures under the letters and making squares and diagrams with letters in them, trying to find the cipher. Mr. Bashford sniffed when I told him about Oscar's theory, and said if Oscar could only find the cipher in his head, he'd be doing himself a favor.

I felt awful sorry for the Davises, though. You know how folks do when some one has been arrested, or something like that, and some of their relations happen around. They stop talking all at once, and then the relations know they have been talking about the one that is in trouble. That was the way folks acted about Annie. When any of the Davises came about they would break off in the middle of a sentence and look solemn and stiff, trying to seem unconcerned, and then say something about its being a pretty day, but a little more rain would be good for the wheat. And all the wheat had been harvested two weeks before.

V

IT added to the excitement into which Plainville had been plunged when one of the Emigger's horses was stolen. The Emigger came into the office that morning and said:

"Bashford, some miscreant has made away with my trotting stock."

"How?" asked Mr. Bashford, who was looking over the Cincinnati papers.

"Somebody has stolen that black horse."

"Not old Jeff?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better look out or he'll come back and sue you for damages for getting him to steal under false pretences."

The Emigger sat down and laughed with Mr. Bashford. I never could understand how the Emigger could take things so easy. Nothing ever troubled him. He was always the same, his long, black coat swinging just as easy, and his black slouch hat set kind of sideways on his head, as if he hadn't a care in the world. He went ahead and told Mr. Bashford how he had

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

gone to the barn to get ready to start out on a trip with his wagon and team, and found the black horse missing. He said he had gone up to tell Mrs. Gillup about it, and that she said she declared to goodness such a thing had never happened before to that horse, and she hoped he wouldn't lay it to her account in any way. And then he and Mr. Bashford tilted back their chairs and laughed until they hadn't any breath left.

"You'll have to get an automobile now, Colquhoun," Mr. Bashford said.

"No. I'm about tired of being a ragman. I've been thinking I'd like to be an editor."

Mr. Bashford said some Latin that is in the back of the dictionary.

"*'Facilis descensus Averni,'*" he said. "First a ragman, then an editor. Colquhoun, take warning before it is too late. You have your pure young life before you. Don't begin acquiring a past by wholesale."

"But I've always had a leaning towards journalism, Bashford."

"Yes. You're one of the people who think being a journalist is sitting in a sway-backed chair chewing fine-cut, and writing cards of thanks to folks who have laid a fine pumpkin on ye editorial desk. I'll bet there are more people than you could shake a stick at trying

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to chew up the visible supply of fine-cut and mould public opinion."

"Let's quit joking, Bashford, and get down to—hello, here comes the detective!" the Emigger said.

Oscar Ferguson came in, out of breath and all worked up.

"How do you do, Mr. Pinkerton?" Mr. Bashford said.

"That isn't Pinkerton, it's Sherlock Holmes," the Emigger laughed.

"No, it isn't," Mr. Bashford put in. "It's Old Nick Carter, or Never-say-die. What's the matter, Oscar? Got a clew in your system that you can't cough up?"

"Now, Mr. Bashford," Oscar began, "this isn't any time for joking."

"Huh! There's never been a real time for merry badinage since I became the glorious harbinger of intelligence in this community," Mr. Bashford replied. "But what's interfering with your digestion, Oscar?"

"Mr. Colquhoun's horse."

"His horse? Look here, Oscar Ferguson, if you've gone into that barn and eaten that horse, hide, hair, and hoofs, there'll be trouble for you. No wonder—"

The Emigger chuckled at this, and then nudged Mr. Bashford in the side and said for

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

him to quit teasing Oscar, and let him tell what he wanted to.

“What about my horse, Oscar?” he asked.

“It’s been stolen,” Oscar said, leaning against the showcase that holds the job stock.

“Spoken like Gaboriau!” Mr. Bashford cried. “Oscar, you’ve got hold of the thread, and if you don’t unravel the mystery it won’t be your fault.”

“I mean, you know it’s been stolen,” Oscar said, squirming around. “And I just wanted to ask Mr. Colquhoun a few questions about it, and see if I couldn’t find it for him.”

“Go ahead with your questions, Oscar,” the Emigger said. “If I can throw any light upon it, I am at your service.”

Oscar got a sheet of paper, took out his pencil, wet the end of it with his tongue, and asked:

“What time did you last see the de—the horse?”

“About seven o’clock last night.”

“What were the circumstances attending that occasion?”

“He sang a lullaby to it and tucked it in its little bed,” Mr. Bashford said.

“Quit devilling the boy, Bashford,” the Emigger said. “The circumstances attending the occasion, Oscar, were that I bedded the horse down and left the barn.”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Did you notice anything peculiar in its actions?”

“No. So far as I could see, it was not plotting to be stolen.”

“What kind of bedding did you put in the stall?”

“Straw—wheat straw.”

Oscar looked wise and pulled a handful of straw from his pocket.

“Could you identify this straw?” he asked.

“I should not like to be certain about it, but it looks like the same straw. Of course, one wheat straw looks much like another, and I had neglected to put my initials on the straw I was using; but this looks like the same kind, anyhow.”

Oscar put the straw back in his pocket and made another note on the paper.

“Where did you get that straw, Oscar?” Mr. Bashford asked.

“We cannot divulge matters to the press at this stage of the investigation,” Oscar replied, jotting down something more on the paper and looking very mysterious.

“How old was the horse?” he asked the Emigger.

“That I cannot tell. I should judge, in an off-hand estimate, that the animal was not less than twenty years of age.”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Oscar put that down.

“Is there any particular person you might suspect of this crime?”

“Well, none that I think of at present.”

“Had any one made any threats to steal the horse?”

“No.”

“Mr. Colquhoun, do you recognize this footprint?”

“What one?”

Oscar reached under his coat and brought out a big chunk of plaster of Paris. It was something the shape of the sole of a shoe, and had mud and straw fastened in it. The Emigger took it in his hands and turned it over and over, looking first at it and then at Oscar.

“Speak up,” Mr. Bashford said; “if you know that footprint, it is your duty to say so and end the suspense.”

“I don’t know it,” the Emigger said. “Where in the world did you get such a thing as this, Oscar?”

“In your barn-yard, right by the door where your horse was led out. I poured plaster of Paris in it and took a mould. That is a valuable clew.”

The Emigger handed the footprint back to him, and Oscar made some more notes. Then he asked:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Do you know of any person in this vicinity who would have a desire for that horse?”

“No; no one except myself.”

“Thank you, Mr. Colquhoun. I will work this case in connection with others that are occupying my time, and will report to you from time to time.”

“Can you hold out any hope to him, Oscar?” Mr. Bashford asked.

“I cannot make promises, but we may expect results.”

“Then the straw, the foot-print, and the fact that Mr. Colquhoun suspects no one, are to your keen mind the fingers of suspicion?”

“Mr. Bashford, you will readily understand that it would be fatal to the success of my efforts if I were to discuss my plans through the medium of the press.”

“All right, Mr. Old Sleuth,” Mr. Bashford laughed.

“Now, don't you let him worry you, son,” the Emigger said, putting his hand on Oscar's shoulder. “No matter what I might think about the way you are going about this, let me say to you that I appreciate greatly the interest you are taking in my loss, and that you have my hearty thanks for your sympathy and earnestness. Ambition,” he turned to

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Mr. Bashford and said, "is a flower that is often withered in the bud by the cold breath of ridicule. Give the boys a chance. No matter how much fun we think we are having out of them, it is a moral certainty that they have more fun and get more good out of what we laugh at. Sail in, son, and run this horse to earth. They've got no right to poke fun at you for being on the side of law and order."

Mr. Bashford chuckled again as Oscar gathered up his notes and went out. Then he looked at the Emigger and said:

"Old Virginny never die! I never saw a Virginian yet who couldn't yank a moral precept out of any situation in life."

"And a blamed good moral precept, too," the Emigger replied, laughing. "Now, let's talk about me getting into the newspaper business."

"Are you serious about that?"

"Certainly, sir. I'm going to move in society here, and people would rather have me among them socially as an editor than as a ragman."

"Maybe so, but first time you forget to say that the bride is one of Plainville's fairest daughters, you'll find yourself in more trouble than if you had traded a leaky coffee-pot for father's old suit."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“But about the proposition to become an editor, Bashford?”

“Let’s talk that over to-night. It sounds all right. We’ll see if we can’t get together, Colquhoun. But if you’ll excuse me, I’ll not talk business to-day. I want to see if there have been any more developments in the Annie Davis case—and maybe there’ll be something new about your horse.”

“Well, if I hadn’t plumb forgot that horse!”

“Bet a purty the man that stole it wished he could forget it by this time.”

VI

MR. BASHFORD said he was sorry that the Emigger's horse had been stolen, but that so far there was one ray of sunshine in the gloom—Orphena Green had not written a poem about it. Orphena writes poetry every time any one dies, and Mr. Bashford says that one time when there was a funeral and the preacher asked, "O death, where is thy sting?" the friends of the late deceased arose in a body and read one of her poems. But Mr. Bashford stretches the truth sometimes.

The Emigger was in earnest when he talked with Mr. Bashford about becoming a journalist, for the next week he sold his other horse and the rag-wagon and bought a half interest in the *Chronicle*. He and Mr. Bashford had another desk put in for him to work at, and Mr. Bashford said that for the present he had better be the fighting editor. The Emigger got a good deal of local items the first week, though, and he wrote them up better than Mr. Bashford did, too. The Emigger knew more ad-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

jectives. But about the first thing he did when he became one of the editors was to say that there shouldn't be anything more printed about Annie Davis having run away.

"Poor girl," he said, "there's enough talk about her in town without us keeping it alive. I believe she would be coming home right now if she didn't know that the whole town was tearing her to pieces."

Mr. Bashford looked at the Emigger kind of sharply when he said that, but the Emigger looked him right in the eye.

"Friend of the family?" Mr. Bashford asked, smiling as if he knew something.

"Yes, and a friend of humanity, too, Bashford," the Emigger replied.

So after that the paper quit printing items about how no further clues had been found. But Oscar Ferguson did not give up the case. He still had the note Annie had left when she ran away, and he kept on trying to figure out the hidden cipher in it. He got so that he could sit down with that note for half an hour and work out a hidden message that was all the way from two to five times as long as the note itself. He worked out one that was in rhyme, and Mr. Bashford told him that this meant that it was Orphena Green who had run away, and that Orphena was Annie Davis in

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

disguise. But Oscar didn't mind Mr. Bashford's joking so much as he otherwise would, for he was also greatly occupied with trailing down the Emigger's stolen horse. Sometimes he would get the two cases confused, and talk about Annie being stolen and the horse leaving a farewell note.

Oscar was in the office talking to me one afternoon, telling me how he would unravel the mystery if there was a national bank in Plainville and it should be blown open and robbed at high noon and the robbers got away without leaving any trace except a cold chisel and a burned match, when Mr. Bashford came in with the mail, and said to the Emigger:

"Well, here's one of the unexpected surprises of journalism in such a seething mart of commerce as Plainville."

"What is it?" the Emigger asked. "Circus coming?"

"No. Better than that. A new subscriber. Gee, but that carries me back in memory! Let's see. When was the last time that we got a new subscriber? Seems to me that it was when the Honorable Tobe Ridgely, of Kensington, wanted the nomination for congressman, and subsidized me by paying a dollar for a whole year's subscription. Well, history repeats herself—but she is a long time

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

about it. She stutters, doesn't she, Colquhoun?"

"Who's your new subscriber?"

"Don't know. It comes by mail. A fair lady who lives near my former home, Cincinnati. Doubtless she has heard of my rise in the world and wishes to keep trace of my strides along the pathway of fame. At any rate, she sends a dollar bill in this letter, and asks us to mail her the *Chronicle* regularly."

He tossed the envelope over to the Emigger, who opened it and read the letter, which said:

"*Mr. E. J. Bashford, editor of 'The Plainville Chronicle.'*

"Enclosed please find a dollar, for which please send the *Chronicle* to this address for one year.

"Yours truly,

"FLORENCE DENNIS,

"Oaktown, Ohio."

"Where is Oaktown?" the Emigger inquired.

"It's about ten miles from Cincinnati. Been through there many a time," Mr. Bashford said.

"And who is Miss Florence Dennis?"

"Hanged if I know. Maybe some one who used to know me, as I suggested, or maybe she's one of the Dennises, of Virginia, who wants to encourage you in your trial heat along the road of literature."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

The Emigger smiled, and said that whoever she was the dollar would help some, and put her name in the book where we keep the list of single wrappers, and threw the envelope on the floor. Then he and Mr. Bashford finished their work and went to supper. Oscar started out after them, but he stopped and bent down when he got to the Emigger's desk, and pretty soon I heard him catch his breath. Then he straightened up and came back to me, his eyes big as saucers.

"On the trail!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter with you, Oscar?" I asked him.

"On the trail! Let them laugh at me and deride my systems of deductions, but Ferguson, the detective, will yet show them that he knows what he is about. I knew I was on the right track when I hunted for the cipher in Annie Davis's note."

"Have you figured out another?"

"I'm on the trail, I tell you. Look here."

He held out an envelope addressed to Mr. Bashford. I didn't see anything strange about it and said so.

"No, you don't, but I, with my trained eye, do. Whose writing is that?"

"How would I know?"

"Yes, how would you? It's my business to

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

know things. That's the envelope that new subscription came in."

"Well?"

"Well, look here."

Oscar took out Annie Davis's farewell note and held it beside the envelope. Sure enough, the writing was a good deal alike. Only on the envelope you could see that whoever had written it had tried to write awkwardly.

"Where's that letter that was in this envelope, Johnny?"

"On Mr. Colquhoun's desk."

"Get it for me."

I told Oscar that I had no business fooling with what was on the desk of either Mr. Bashford or Mr. Colquhoun, and that if he wanted the letter he had better go and find Mr. Colquhoun and tell him what he thought he had discovered. Then Mr. Colquhoun, I knew, would let him have it.

"No, no," Oscar said, squinting his eyes and looking dark and shrewd. "That would be fatal. Colquhoun or Bashford must never know of this. A careless word from either of them would destroy the result of all my tireless, careful work. It wouldn't do. I must have that letter without their knowledge. But how to get it!"

He looked at me so piercingly that I shiv-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ered and pried a line that was in my stick. I never saw a boy so excited as he was. His fingers trembled and his lips were shaking.

"Get it for me, Johnny," he begged.

"No, I won't."

"Then, if you're a friend of mine, go across the street for a minute. Ask me no questions, but do as I tell you. And promise never on your honor to divulge what I have shown to you."

By that time he had me so worked up that I did what he asked, although I knew I would be sorry for it afterwards. I went across the street and back, and when I came into the office Oscar was buttoning up his coat and ready to go out.

"Did you?" I asked.

"Sst! Not a word. What you don't know you can't tell. But I'll say one thing: I'm on the trail at last."

And Oscar hurried out and struck up street towards his house. I felt guilty all the way home after I had shut up the office, and after supper I went over to Oscar's house to talk with him about what we had done. But he wasn't at home. Mr. Ferguson was out in the yard, and when he saw me he asked:

"Johnny, what on earth is Oscar up to now?" I said I didn't know; he was always up to so many things that it was hard to keep track of him.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I guess you've hit the nail on the head," Mr. Ferguson said. "He's the beatingest boy in this town. He come running into the house an hour or so ago and told me he had to have some money to go to Cincinnati with. I said he couldn't go, and wanted to know why he wanted to go. He said he couldn't tell me, but he was on the trail. That boy pestered me and his mother, but I held out for it that he couldn't go, but finally he wheedled his mother into coaxing me to let him have ten dollars if he would be back to-morrow night, and I give him the money."

"And he's gone?"

"He's gone to the train now. Say, Johnny, what trail is it?"

I had turned around and was starting out of the gate on a trot.

"Johnny!" Mr. Ferguson yelled at me. I stopped.

"What's Oscar up to? What trail is he on? Annie Davis or that horse?"

"I'll ask him," I shouted back, and ran lickety-split to the depot, for the train to Cincinnati was just pulling in. It left just as I ran up on the platform, and Oscar was on the back car and waved his hand to me. I called to him, but he shook his head that he couldn't say anything.

VII

OSCAR got home on the seven o'clock train from Cincinnati the next evening, and I was at the station to meet him. But his pa was there, too, and Oscar hadn't any more than said "Hello" to me than his pa was telling him to hurry on home with him because his ma was keeping supper waiting for him. I could see by Oscar's face that he had found out something. You know how a boy looks when he knows something that he is afraid to tell but that he just has to tell to somebody or else it will never let him go to sleep. That was the way Oscar looked. And you know how a boy feels when he knows that another boy wants to tell him something as bad as all that. Well, that is just how I felt.

Along about ten o'clock I slipped over to Ferguson's. I went down the alley back of their house and climbed over the garden fence and fell down over a cucumber hill. Some one came out on the back porch and asked who was there, but I laid still and said noth-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ing. After a minute or so whoever it was said he guessed nobody was there after all, and went back into the house. Then he—it was Mr. Ferguson—took the lamp off the sitting-room table and went up-stairs. I waited and waited. I saw the light go into the room where Oscar slept, and could just hear voices in that room. It seemed to me that Mr. Ferguson was trying to find out from Oscar where he had been and what he had done, and that Oscar wouldn't tell. After another long time the light left Oscar's room and went into another room away around on the side of the house. Then it went out, and I knew Mr. Ferguson had gone to bed. I waited some more, and then I whistled. It was a whistle that only Oscar and I used. I got no answer, and so I whistled again. Directly, Oscar came softly, out on the back porch. I whistled real low, and he came down the steps. Then his ma called:

“Oscar, is that you?”

“Yes'm,” he said.

“Where in the world are you going?”

“To get a drink.”

He went to the pump and pumped some. I sneaked up to the harvest-apple-tree not far from the pump and whispered:

“Oscar.”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"That you, Johnny?" he whispered back.

"Yes."

"Be there in a minute."

He came over where I was and sat down in the grass by me. He just had on his night-shirt, and he tucked his feet up under him and shivered a little. It was the beginning of August, and we were having cool nights.

"What did you find out?" I whispered.

"'Sh! Wait a minute."

I waited. I understood. He wanted his folks to go to sleep before he would talk to me. We sat there and looked up through the branches of the tree at the stars. I never saw such a still night. Not a leaf was stirring on the tree. The sky was kind of a deep, dark blue, and was farther away than I ever noticed it to be. But the stars shone like great, big lanterns. Stars are very solemn things, when you come to think of them. I thought of them a good deal that night while Oscar and I laid there, afraid to say a word. I wondered why the stars were there, and what they really were, anyhow. Four or five of them were great, big, white stars that seemed to be pushing back the little yellow ones so they could make all the light that was to be made. And the Milky Way started away off down by the Indian mound and arched right up over our

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

heads and dropped again up the creek by the railroad culvert. It looked just as if you had taken a wide brush and swept it above you and across the sky. I thought of how I had read somewhere that every speck in the Milky Way was a sun, and had earths and planets running around it, and comets shooting every which way, but we couldn't see anything except the haze which was really made up of suns that were millions of miles apart. And then the big stars! I wondered if some one lived on them—if people were there, and if maybe two boys were sitting or laying out under an apple-tree away up there, billions and trillions of miles away, and looking down here at a little speck of light and wondering if any one was living on it. I wondered what I would find if I was to start in a balloon or something and go on and on between those stars, out through the dark—and I shivered when I thought of where I would fall and what I would hit, if I hit anything at all, if the balloon should burst. I tell you, a fellow gets to thinking some mighty solemn things when he looks at the stars, and everything is still all around him. That night we couldn't hear a sound, except now and then a screech-owl away out in the country, or old Squire Miller snoring. He lives across the street from Ferguson's.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Well, I saw Annie Davis."

I jumped, and I would have yelled. It was Oscar speaking right there beside me, and he only whispered it, but just then I was so full of ideas about folks being on the stars that I thought it was some one talking to me from a planet, or maybe a ghost. Oscar put his hand over my mouth and said:

"Keep cool. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

I said I guessed I must have been half asleep; then he went on:

"I saw Annie Davis. I worked that cipher out all right, Johnny. I knew it when I found that envelope on the floor of the office. Didn't I tell you I was on the trail?"

"You saw Annie Davis?"

"Yes. She's Florence Dennis, of Oaktown, Ohio."

"She is?"

I've read detective stories, all the way from the five-cent ones that you can buy on the train to the ones that that man gets five dollars a word for writing, but this was different. I was seeing a real detective story now, and I tell you I felt shaky.

"Yes," Oscar went on, speaking as calm and cool as if he was telling about going swimming, "I saw her and I talked to her. I went to

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Cincinnati, then got on a street-car and went out to Oaktown. It took me all this morning to locate her. I had an idea that she would strive to conceal her identity by taking an assumed name, and be working out in some family as cook or something like that. You see, Johnny, if you're going to be a detective you have got to be able to form theories. If I hadn't had a theory about Annie Davis I never would have—"

"Go on and tell me how you found her."

"All right," Oscar said, kind of hurt because I choked him off before he could tell me how he made his theories. "I asked careless like about a girl answering her description."

"Who did you ask?"

"Now, who would you ask if you wanted to find a girl who was a servant?"

"Ring the door-bell and look for her when she answered it."

"That shows how much you know. I asked the man that drives the delivery wagon for the only grocery in Oaktown."

"Did he know her?"

"Right away. It was dead easy. He told me where to go to find her, and I went there. I went to the kitchen door, and there she was inside, washing the dishes."

"What did she do when she saw you?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“She kind of gasped, and let the dishcloth fall, then called me by name and wanted to know what in the world I was doing there. ‘That’s just what I was going to ask you,’ I says. Then she asked me how I happened to be in Oaktown, and I said that I was going around a little to see the country, and heard she was there, and thought I would drop in and see her. You see, Johnny, if you’re going to be a detective you must never give away the real purpose of your actions. If I’d told Annie right off that I had come down there to find her she would have been scared to death and would have run out of that kitchen, like as not, and hid somewhere’s else. ‘How’s everybody at home?’ she asked me. ‘Pretty well, the last I heard from there,’ I says, as if I had been away for a long time. Then before she had a chance to ask me how long I had been away I told her I thought she was on the stage. She got red and white, and stammered a little, and then she looked at me and froze me. Up to that minute she had been so glad to see me, because I was from home, that she had forgot that I was just a boy while she was a young woman—and when I said that she got the idea I was trying to be a smart Aleck, and she put on her dignity. I apologized right away, of course, told her I didn’t mean to offend her,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and that really I thought, like everybody else, that she was a great actress by this time. 'Well, Oscar,' she says, kind of sad, 'I never went on the stage.' 'You didn't?' I asked. 'Then where have you been all this time?' 'Right here,' she told me. Then she looked at me suspicious like and asks real quick, 'How did you know I was here?' I almost gave myself away. I was about to tell her how I found out, when I recollected that would never do. You know a detective must never—"

"I know. What did you say to her?" I broke in, turning up my coat collar and shivering when a shooting-star zipped across the sky.

"I told her I just accidentally found out she was at that house," Oscar said, huffy like because I interrupted him. "Then I saw that she was anxious to get the news from home, so I told her about how bad her folks were feeling and all that sort of thing, and first thing I knew she was crying. 'What do the people up there think of me?' she asked. 'Why,' I says, just as kind as I could say it, 'everybody thinks the same of you as ever. Nobody would dare say a word against you as long as the Emigger is there.' 'The Emigger?' she asks, sort of puzzled, then smiled. 'Oh yes, Mr. Colquhoun. I had almost forgotten that

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

was his nickname.' So then I asked her why she didn't come home, and she said she might come after a while, but not now. Then she wanted to know when I expected to go home, and I told her I wasn't right sure, but I expected to go back pretty soon. And she asked me please never to tell any one I had seen her, but I said I couldn't make that promise, because you know a fellow might be on his dying bed and then some one might ask him a question, and of course he would feel like telling the truth about whatever they asked him. So then I—"

Just then Mrs. Ferguson came out on the porch and called:

"Oscar."

"Yes, ma."

"Where are you?"

"Out here with Johnny."

"Well, the very idea! You march right into this house and go to your bed. The very idea! Sitting out there in your night-shirt, catching your death o' cold. Johnny Thompson, you go straight home. Like as not your ma is worrying herself to death wondering where you are. What in the name of time do you two boys find to talk about at this hour of night? No good, I warrant. Oscar, you come right along in."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Oscar was going up the steps by this time, and so I went on out through the front gate and got home all right. Nobody said anything to me about being out so late, because my folks thought like as not I was working down at the office.

Next morning Oscar told me how his ma made him eat a piece of pie and drink some milk and warm his feet at the kitchen stove, where there was some fire left from getting supper, before he went to bed, and that she simply worried him with questions until at last she had got most of the story out of him. At least, she got him to tell that he had seen Annie Davis and talked with her. Of course, she didn't mean to tell a soul, but before noon next day it was all over town, and Oscar was being stopped every ten steps by folks that wanted to ask him about it, and to pat him on the shoulder and brag about how smart and smooth he was. Squire Miller and Marshal Smith and Fred Parker and some more of them had him cornered under the awning at Jordan's grocery, and squire was so interested that he had quit playing a tune on his locust leaf, when the Emigger came into the crowd as if he was in a hurry, and grabbed Oscar by the arm and started off with him towards the office.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I want to see you, Oscar," he said. Oscar told me afterwards that when the Emigger looked at him and said that he felt as if he was guilty of something. The Emigger brought Oscar to the office and got the story out of him in about three minutes, and then asked him:

"Why didn't you tell us about this when you found that clew?"

"I was afraid you would laugh at me."

"Well, maybe it isn't too late yet," the Emigger said, getting up and starting out. Mr. Bashford was coming in just then, and the Emigger stopped.

"Hello," said Mr. Bashford to Oscar. "Here's Vidocq the Great home again. Let me congratulate you."

Oscar got red and looked foolish, then bucked up and said:

"Well, I found her all right."

"Bashford," the Emigger said, "I'm going out of town this afternoon for a day or so."

"Going into the detective business, too?" Mr. Bashford asked.

"Maybe," the Emigger replied, with a funny smile.

He went down to Davis's and talked with the folks there a while, and then that afternoon he went to Cincinnati. Instead of being

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

back in a day or so he didn't come home for over a week. He wrote to Mr. Bashford that Annie Davis had left her place in Oaktown the same afternoon that Oscar was there, and that she hadn't been heard of since, but that he thought he might locate her. Anyhow, he would see what he could find out.

VIII

IT was along about this time that Orphena Green started the barefoot cure in Plainville. It seemed to me while the Emigger was away that week that there wasn't anything happening at all until Orphena tried to organize the Barefoot Health Culture Club. Orphena was the greatest woman to organize clubs you ever saw. Mr. Bashford said he counted that week lost whose Saturday night did not see a new club suggested by Orphena. Once she got up a poetry club that was to read the works of Shakespeare and Byron and some others, and criticise them; and then next she organized an Omar Khayyam—Mr. Bashford says that man spelled his name that way because of his lack of education—an Omar Khayyam Club, but when they got to reading verses about wine some of the temperance ladies objected, and although Orphena explained that it was meant in the figurative sense, they condemned the book and got up such a hot discussion that nearly everybody in

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

town bought a copy of it, and the boys would steal it from the house and try to read it down the creek or back of the livery-stable. It really wasn't bad at all—just a lot of stuff about a man named Jamshid and the Rose, and about every other word began with a capital letter, and there was a lot of notes at the bottom of the pages. It looked too much like a grammar for the boys to like it very much. Mr. Bashford said that no matter what kind of a club Orphena got up, a quilting-bee by any other name remained the same. But he always printed notices about the club meetings, and if they only had cake and lemonade he wrote that "a superb collation was served." But I started out to tell about the Barefoot Health Culture Club.

Orphena came up to our house and asked ma if she didn't want to join. Ma asked her what it was to be. Pa was sitting there at the time.

"It is to be the Barefoot Health Culture Club," Orphena said. "You see, there is a new discovery that if people would only go barefooted they would never be sick."

"Who discovered it?" pa asked.

"A doctor in Germany," Orphena answered.

"Corn doctor?" pa asked.

"No, indeed. He is one of the world's

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

greatest savants," Orphena replied, pronouncing the last word "s'vahnts."

"Has he got a grudge against the shoe stores?" pa wanted to know.

"Now, Mr. Thompson, don't make fun of me, please. This is really a wonderful discovery. If it had been known years ago the world would have been a better and a happier place."

"Maybe so," pa said. "But I had an idea that it wasn't altogether a new plan. It runs in my mind that the same scheme was tried a good long time ago. Seems to me I've heard of people who had the barefoot fad—but from what I read and learned about them they did not get along very well."

"Why, I never heard of its being tried before," Orphena declared.

"He's only joking," ma said.

"No, I'm not. I think I can find it all recorded for you."

"Recorded?" Orphena asked. "I'd just like to know where. I don't believe you can show me anything about it."

"Oh yes, I can. If you'll take the trouble to look up the book of Genesis you'll read about a gentleman named Adam and a lady named Eve who went barefooted, and—"

But Orphena had got up and was flouncing

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

out, muttering that she was insulted, and that it was rude to treat a scientific subject in such a frivolous way. Pa laid back in his chair and laughed as hard as he could, and ma went to the door with Orphena and tried to smooth things over, but Orphena was mad clear through.

Orphena finally got up her club. She was president of it, of course, and she got about a dozen members to join. Flora Banford was the first one to sign the roll. Miss Banford has been to nearly all the sanatoriums in the country. She gets nervous prostration regularly every spring, and goes away for a rest cure or something like that. Mr. Bashford says he keeps an item in type all the time, so as to save the trouble of setting it up every spring, that "Miss Flora Banford left this week for treatment in a health resort. She is suffering from a severe attack of nervous prostration." Sometimes Flora has to be carried to the train on a cot, and other times she starts from their house about an hour before train time, and almost creeps to the depot. Mr. Bashford says that once she stopped half-way to the depot to tell somebody about how weak she was, and that she raised her arm and waved it over her head and said:

"If I was to lift my arm this way it would kill me."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Then old Mrs. Anderson, who is a theosophist, and also says that she is a mind-reader and a psychologist, joined in with Flora and Orphena, and then Orphena got a paper that had a whole page telling how the barefoot-cure fad was the most popular thing in New York society. The others joined as soon as they saw that. The club was to take its first treatment Monday morning, and Sabbath at church—or after church, rather—there was a lot of talk among them. Each one that was in the club had to explain all about it to those that didn't understand what the object was.

Friday, Lafe Skidmore came into the office. Lafe lives out at the edge of town in a tumble-down little shack of a house, and he never does any work at all. In the forenoons he loafs in front of Jordan's grocery, in the afternoons he generally sits in the harness-shop and tells war stories, and at night he loafs around the depot until it closes, and then he stays around the livery-stable until it is time to go home. Mr. Bashford says that when Plainville was laid out the surveyor saw Lafe in a field about a mile away and took him for a stump, and sighted his instrument on him to lay out Main Street. But Lafe kept moving slowly to keep in the shade of the woods, and the result was

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

that Main Street has a crook in it like a dog's hind leg. I don't believe Lafe is as old as that, but it is the truth that Main Street is crooked.

Lafe had been working for a few days and wasn't feeling very well, so Mr. Bashford told him all about the barefoot cure, and how the new club was being organized.

"People are making mistakes every day, Lafe," Mr. Bashford said. "They rub on stuff to make their hair grow, and they take stuff to make their stomachs work, when really if they would just go barefoot they would keep in perfect health."

"Why don't you go barefoot, Mr. Bashford?" Lafe asked.

"I do—half the time," Mr. Bashford said.

"I wonder if it would help me any?"

"If I were you I would join that club."

Well, the Barefoot Club started out Monday morning bright and early. They were to begin their treatment by walking barefoot from Mc-Filkin's woods across the fields and meadows to town. They all walked out there with their shoes on, and none of them happened to think that the pike they would have to cross coming home had just been covered with a lot of chip-rock. Oscar Ferguson and I went out to watch them march. It was a lot of fun.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

They all went into the woods and took off their shoes and stockings, and came out giggling. But Miss Green talked to them for a few minutes about the high and noble object they were pursuing, and they quieted down.

Then they started forth.

Miss Green was in the lead. She had her shoes and stockings hanging over her arm, and she walked with her head up and her shoulders back, like the pictures of Joan of Arc leading her army. Back of her was Flora Banford. Flora had been talking about communing with nature in her varied moods and plucking the nestling beauties of the dell, and telling about how she suffered so much the last week with nervous prostration. Mrs. Anderson walked beside Flora. Mrs. Anderson, I forgot to say, must weigh two hundred and eighty pounds, and of course she walked slow, but she had a faraway look in her eyes, like she has when she talks about mahatmas and things from India. The others trailed along through the field—it was a pasture, and the grass was nice and soft.

Oscar and I kept up with them, looking for the fun. We knew that the next place they would have to go through would be a stubble-field, and anybody that ever tried to walk barefoot across stubble knows what that means. Miss Green made us boys go on

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ahead while they climbed through the barbed-wire fence. We got about half-way across the stubble and then turned around to see if they were coming. Miss Green was about a hundred feet from the barbed-wire fence, Mrs. Anderson and Miss Banford were keeping up pretty well, but the rest were stepping mighty carefully. Every now and then some woman would shout, "Ouch!" and jump sideways, and then step on the stubble with the other foot and scream again. Oscar and I kept away ahead of them so we could laugh without being impolite. We could hear what they said from time to time. One of them would groan, "Well, if I'd known it was this way!" Then another would exclaim: "Oh, my goodness alive!" "Ooh!" "For mercy sakes!" "Oh, dear, oh, dear! Will we never get across?" and things like that. And when they were pretty near through the field some one of them cried: "My gracious! Who is that?"

And walking side by side with them, only about forty feet away, was Lafe Skidmore, barefooted, with his pants rolled up to his knees. Lafe was limping something awful, and saying things that nobody could hear but that anybody could guess. He didn't make it across the field. All of a sudden he sat right down where he was and put on his shoes.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Orphena Green said that displayed the weaker nature of man, and that the world looked to woman to show it the light. At last they got through the stubble, and then they all sat down on the grass and fanned themselves and looked at one another. Their hats were lopsided and their hair was stringing down into their eyes, and their faces were red as beets. They kept their feet tucked up under them like they were chickens.

Mrs. Anderson puffed for breath and said: "Well, this is a good cure, I know. But it might have been better to take it in homœopathic doses."

Orphena arose and said that they must go onward in their march of progress. So they limped across the fields to the pike, but even if the grass was nice and thick they went awful slow. And when they came out to the pike—Oscar and I had opened the big gate for them so they wouldn't have to climb the fence—I never heard such moans and exclamations. All the way, as far as you could see, the pike was covered with chiprock. If anybody was to try to walk across that it would cut their feet all to pieces. Mrs. Anderson just dropped right down at the side of the road and vowed she wouldn't go a step farther. Miss Banford dropped down, too, and began to cry. She

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

said she knew she would have a relapse of nervous prostration before night, and Miss Green spoke up right sharp and said she ought to be glad, because she had been trying for a whole month to get up an excuse for having it so that she could brag about having it twice in one year. It looked as if they were going to quarrel right there, but some of the others spoke up and said this wasn't the time or the place for harsh words. After a while Mrs. Anderson said for us boys to go on home now, because they wanted to put on their shoes and walk the rest of the way that way. So we started off towards the cross-roads that turns into town, but we hadn't got out of sight over the hill before we heard them calling for us to come back. Lafe Skidmore was laying under a tree at the top of the hill, and he got up and looked towards the women. They were all yelling for us to come back. So Oscar and me and Lafe Skidmore hurried where they were. It was rich. When they had tried to get their shoes on their feet were so swollen and sore that they couldn't get them into the shoes, and there they were two miles from town and no way to get home without going barefoot. Some of them were giggling kind of funny, and others were crying, but Miss Green and Mrs. Anderson just sat and glared at each other.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Oh, dear!” Flora Banford said. “How on earth will I ever get my poor feet to quit hurting?”

“I’d try the barefoot cure if I was you, mum,” Lafe said.

That gave them an excuse. They must have all been aching for a chance to say what they thought, and so they all turned on Lafe Skidmore, and if they didn’t read his title clear it was because they got out of breath before they got through scolding him for loafing around and letting his garden grow up with weeds and his roof get leaky and himself be the town joke as a loafer. And besides, Lafe didn’t let them finish. He got up and started away while they were all talking at once, and when he got about a quarter of a mile off he turned and hollered back that there was other ways of being a fool besides loafing.

“Johnny,” Orphena Green said to me, “won’t you and Oscar please go to the livery-stable and have them send the big picnic ’bus out for us?”

Of course we would. And then they all asked us not to say a word to anybody about why they wanted the ’bus. We said, “All right.” But everybody in town knew about their starting out that morning, and we had to tell who the rig was for; and even if they did

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

have the 'bus drive up back streets and take them home, there was a lot of folks that just happened to be around the neighborhood when each of them crawled out and limped into the house. Most of them stayed in their houses the rest of the week, rubbing salve and stuff on their feet, and when they did get out they all blamed everything on Orphena Green; but they couldn't say much because they didn't want to get her so mad she wouldn't write poems for their birthday-parties and anniversaries and weddings and things like that.

Mr. Bashford asked me all about it, and I told him the whole story, just about as I have written it here, except, of course, it is a good while now since it happened, and at that time I could remember a good deal more about it. Mr. Bashford wrote a whole long article about it, giving the names of the members of the club and all the particulars. Then he read it over and over, and finally tore it up and chuckled, and wrote this item:

“The barefoot cure was given a trial Monday. It was a success. None of the patients will suffer from bare feet for a long while to come.”

IX

I HAD been watching the trains from Cincinnati to see when the Emigger got home, but it began to look as if he wasn't coming back. And then people began to shake their heads and look wise and wonder why he had gone away so mysteriously—just as strangely as he had come to Plainville. Even though he had made no effort to conceal anything about himself, there were lots of folks who still thought there was something peculiar about him. And so there was lots of talk. Even Oscar Ferguson began working up a theory about him. But then Oscar could give you a theory about anybody on earth if he just took a notion to do it.

The crowd that always hung around the depot to see the trains come in got as anxious as I was to see if the Emigger got off any of the trains from Cincinnati. There is always the same lot of people to see the afternoon trains arrive. In the morning there are not so many, but in the afternoon and evening there

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

are all the way from ten to fifteen people there. Old Wash Purdy is at every train from seven in the morning to nine at night. He always stands by the little bay-window where the telegraph operator sits, no matter whether it is a train that will stop or a fast train. The mail clerks on the expresses have tried for five years to hit him with a mail-sack, but they have always missed him. Once one of the mail-sacks came so close to him that it knocked his cane out of his hand, and he wrote a letter to the President about it. He has the answer he got. It is all full of creases and torn places from being folded and unfolded so often to show it. Wash will tell all about how he was standing by the operator's window when the up express came whizzing along.

"I was standing right there," he will say, "right where I've stood for going on fifteen years, or ever since they built the depot, and I was attending to my business, as I've got a right to do, and I seen this here lop-eared feller named Jimison, that thinks he's away up in the government just because Congressman Morey got him a place in the mail service--I seen him a-hanging his head out o' the mail-car and sighting at me. That scoundrel has tried to kill me with that mail-sack for five years, and has put all the rest of the dod-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

gasted office-holdin' leeches that's fattening off o' the country's money up to the same trick. I seen him a-hangin' his dad gummed lop-eared head out o' that mail-car and swingin' the mail-sack back an' forth and gettin' sight on me, an' I says to myself, says I: 'Well, Mister Jimison, I'll just stand my ground an' see what you'll do with your bedinged old mail-sack. I fit in the war, an' I'm not goin' to turn tail an' run for a lazy, lop-eared galoot that 'ain't got enough mother-wit to earn his livin' workin' on the ground like ordinary law-abidin' citizens has to.' An' just then the engine went a-whoopin' past, an' fust thing I knew, my cane that I've carried sence I cut it on a side-hill after the battle of Gettysburg was knocked out o' my hand an' broke to flinders against the side o' the depot, an' that there mail-sack whanged through the air an' come slammin' against the bay-window an' scared that telegraph feller inside so bad he dropped the rope that holds the signal-block. But I stood my ground, an' I shook my fist at the bedanged train where I could see that lop-eared Jimison feller still hangin' out an' grinnin' back at me. An' then, soon as I got home, I set down an' I wrote to the President o' this here country, an' I ast him if he was agoin' to allow such goin's on. An'

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

'twasn't a week afore I got this letter from his seckertary sayin' my communication had been duly received. 'Duly received'—there it is, in black an' white. No gettin' around that. An' none o' them high an' mighty mail clerks has throwed any o' their dadbinged mail-sacks at me sence then. I guess not! It's a free country, an' if they did it again there'd be some political excitement hereabouts."

Then he will fold his letter up and stamp up beside the operator's window, and whack his cane on the platform as if he was daring the whole United States mail to come and fight him.

Well, the Emigger came home, but he didn't come home from Cincinnati. He came down the line from the other direction. He walked into the office about eleven in the morning, just after the 10.45 train had arrived. I hadn't been to it, because it didn't come from Cincinnati.

"Hello, Colquhoun," Mr. Bashford said, getting up and shaking hands with him. "Have a good time?"

"I've had a busy time, Bashford. I've been up to— Johnny, you take the key to the box and run over to the post-office and get the mail."

So I had to go, although I knew he was go-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ing to tell all about his trip. When I got back—I had had to wait until the 10.45 mail was distributed—the Emigger and Mr. Bashford were talking about business, and nothing was said about Annie Davis. All that afternoon people kept coming into the office and asking me what the Emigger had found out. Squire Miller came in, playing his usual tune on a locust leaf, and said:

“Did that feller find Annie?”

“I don’t know, Squire. I didn’t know he was looking for her,” I said.

“Huh! Bet you know all about it.”

“I don’t know, honestly.”

“Huh! You’re pretty deep, you think.”

Mr. Bashford happened to come in just then, and noticed that the Squire was acting rather huffy, so he asked what was the matter.

“This here Thompson boy says he don’t know whether or not your partner found Annie Davis.”

“Why, who said he was hunting her?”

“Nobody. But o’ course there was a rumor that he’d gone to find her.”

“If you’ll watch the freight office for a few days you’ll see a lot of type and paper shipped to us. He bought that while he was away, Squire.”

“Well, it’s all right, Bashford. But Oscar

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Ferguson was talking as if Colquhoun had been following a hint o' his."

"Well, while he was away he bought this stock we have been needing. There isn't anything mysterious about that, is there?"

"Not a bit. Not a bit."

And the Squire went out, tootling on his locust leaf.

Mr. Bashford came back to the case where I was working, and looked at me more seriously than he ever did before.

"Johnny," he said, "what do you know?"

"Nothing," I answered.

"That's right. You'll get a bigger reputation for smartness if you know nothing and acknowledge it."

Oscar came in, looking excited, just before we closed up that evening. I was there alone.

"He's back, isn't he?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Yes," I said, sort of short, because I was tired of that kind of questions.

"Did he find her?"

"I don't know any more about it than you do."

"Johnny, there's something strange about this. I'll discover the mystery before long. Mark my words, Mr. Colquhoun—"

"What about him?" the Emigger asked, stepping into the doorway.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Oscar grinned and looked flustered.

"Oscar," the Emigger went on, "listen to me a minute. You're a smart boy—a mighty smart boy, and you've done me lots of favors. But there is such a thing as a smart boy getting too sharp and finding out things that don't exist. Understand that?"

"I guess so," Oscar replied.

"Well, on the other hand, he can find out things that will do him a lot of good. Now, you made a mistake no real detective would make. You told first about seeing Annie Davis, and then you jumped at a conclusion and told that I had gone to bring her home. I didn't bring her home, and therefore your reputation as a detective is hurt a good deal here. Don't you think it would be better to keep still hereafter till you know what you are talking about?"

"I expect it would."

"If anybody asks you why I went away, you tell them that I bought some stuff for the office, and that's all you know. I don't want you to mix me up in your cases the way you do."

"All right, Mr. Colquhoun. I'll do that. But I just wanted to tell you that I've found another clew about your horse."

The Emigger laughed a little, and then patted Oscar on the shoulder and said:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Go ahead, boy. Trail that horse to the end of the world, but keep it dark until you are sure you’ve got the whole thing clear.”

I could see that the Emigger was angry about the way Oscar had talked. That’s the trouble with Oscar. Mr. Bashford says he will be all right when he learns to think even once before he talks, instead of doing his talking first and his thinking later on. The Emigger went out, and Oscar walked home with me. He didn’t say much for a little while, and then he growled:

“He needn’t have been so hot about it. If he knew I’d found out who stole his horse he would talk a good deal nicer to me.”

“Have you found his horse?” I asked, all excitement.

“No, but I’m on the trail of the man that took it. Johnny, once there was a great French detective named Lecocq, and he made a rule for detecting that was always to suspect the least likely person to have committed the crime. Who is the least likely person in town to have stolen that horse?”

I thought for a good while, and finally I said, “You.”

“Aw, get out! Detectives don’t steal. I’ll tell you who the finger of suspicion points at, if you’ll promise hope to die and cross your

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

heart that you'll never breathe it to a living soul."

I crossed my heart and hoped to die that minute if I'd give it away, and then Oscar whispered:

"Preacher Milton."

Then he stepped back about two feet and watched me to see how I took it. He must have been satisfied, for I had to clap my hand over my mouth to keep from yelling Preacher Milton's name at the top of my voice. Why, old Dr. Milton has been our preacher for years and years. He baptized me and nearly all the boys in town, and he preaches almost all the funerals and marries about everybody that gets married. He is the nicest old white-haired man you ever saw, and the very idea that he would steal a horse! It was as bad as if Oscar had accused me of setting fire to a house.

"You're crazy, Oscar," I said.

"You just wait. And remember, you promised me on your honor never to breathe it to a living soul. To-morrow I'll show you the proofs. Now, Johnny, mum's the word. I'll convince you—I'll make you say I'm right."

I was so worked up over what Oscar had said that I could hardly eat any supper. Ma blamed it on my excitement over the Emigger

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

getting back, and tried to find out if he had seen Annie Davis, and at last I asked her why everybody seemed to think that was why he went away. She just smiled sort of funny at pa, and then I asked:

“But why would he want to find her?”

And then she laughed at me, and said I ought to keep my eyes open if I was going to be a newspaper man. I couldn't understand it.

X

WHEN the Emigger came to the office next morning Mr. Bashford was out getting local advertisements and I was alone. The Emigger came back to me and said:

“Johnny, I expect you think I’m not treating you right.”

“What makes you think that, Mr. Colquhoun?” I asked.

“About my trip. Now I wanted to tell you yesterday about it, because you and I have always been good friends, and I feel that you have an interest in me, but I didn’t get a chance to talk with you. I came back to the office intending to tell you before you went home, but Oscar was here, and that prevented my talking to you as I wanted to. I don’t need to ask you to say nothing of what I tell you. I did go to the place where Oscar found Annie Davis, but she was not there any more. She had gone away the same day Oscar was there. So I had to find the trail, as Oscar would say. I located her finally, north of

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

here. She went through here on a train the same night that Oscar came home."

"And she is coming back?"

"Not right away. She is ashamed of herself for running away as she did, and won't come home now. But she is all right, and will be back some day, I am sure. What we should all do is to hush up all the talk about her so that she will feel that she can come home again without being the subject of any more discussion."

I wouldn't have breathed a word of it after that—not even if wild horses tried to tear it from me. Some way it made me feel a foot taller to be taken into the Emigger's confidence in that way. I knew then that he considered me about his best friend in town, and I determined to stick to him closer than ever before.

Flora Beavers came to the office that day to give us some new subscribers she had got for the *Chronicle*. I haven't said very much about Flora for a good while, but that has been because during most of the things I have been telling of she had been away visiting, and when she got home she went right to work soliciting subscriptions for different things, and was not about home much. She said she had to make up for the money she had spent

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

on her visiting. Mr. Bashford got her to get subscribers for the *Chronicle*, and he had been out to her house a good deal to talk with her about what they were doing since she got home.

When she came in the Emigger got up and bowed, and Mr. Bashford got up and bowed, too.

"Fifteen new subscribers for the *Chronicle*, Mr. Bashford," Miss Beavers said, smiling at him. When Miss Beavers smiles it is one of the best sights you ever saw. It isn't one of those smiles that look as if they were made by twisting the mouth up at the corners. It just smiles of itself, and it makes you feel that she is in earnest about it, that she smiles because she is glad to see you and glad you are glad to see her.

"Fifteen?" said the Emigger, handing her a chair. "That is splendid! If you keep this work up we will have to put in a premium department, so you can get dish-pans or pictures or chairs."

"Oh, Mr. Colquhoun, I've got everything I need about the house now."

"Except a husband," the Emigger said, looking sly. "I believe we will offer a husband to the woman getting us the biggest list of subscribers. That ought to set every un-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

married woman in the country to work for us.”

“It would depend on who the premium was,” Miss Beavers said, smiling again, but this time at Mr. Bashford.

“I’d offer the only man we could spare—Bashford.”

“Better offer a parlor lamp. That would be as good as me,” Mr. Bashford said. “It would smoke and go out nights, too.”

“How ridiculous!” Miss Beavers cried.

Then she gathered up her things and said she must be going. Both the men went to the door with her, and told her to come in often—“and bring fifteen new subscribers with you,” the Emigger said.

“Or come and tell us why you can’t get them,” Mr. Bashford said.

Then they came back and sat down at their tables, and the Emigger kept looking up from his work and chuckling, but Mr. Bashford wrote busily. Finally the Emigger said:

“Eli, you’re a gay old dog.”

When Oscar came in that day he had a big bundle under his arm. He asked me if I was going to be by myself for a while, and I said I thought so, for Mr. Bashford and the Emigger didn’t usually get back for an hour or so after they started out in the afternoon. Oscar then

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

put down his bundle and unwrapped it. The first thing he took out was that old plaster cast of a footprint he had made the morning after the Emigger's horse was stolen.

"The first clew," he said, hoarsely. "Now for the connecting link."

He held up an old shoe. He looked at me as if he expected me to faint or to shout, or do something like that, but I just looked at him and then at the shoe and told him to go on.

"You don't understand yet?" he asked. "Then watch. I take the shoe thus; I place it on the plaster cast. It fits perfectly, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. But what then?"

"Oh, nothing then. Nothing! Of course, all this can't mean anything. Do you have to have a brick house fall on you?"

"No. But what are you driving at?"

"Whose shoe is this?"

He held the shoe up in front of my eyes, and glared at me as if he thought I ought to know the shoe.

"It isn't mine," I said, feeling as if he was playing a joke on me.

"Certainly it isn't. I'll tell you whose it is. It is Preacher Milton's!"

Then he told me how he had worked out his

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

theory that fastened the horse-stealing on Dr. Milton. According to that French detective's theory of suspecting the most innocent person, it could be nobody else than Dr. Milton. And as Oscar had the footprint he had to find if Dr. Milton's shoe would fit it. But how to get the shoe was the problem. Oscar said that all great detectives resorted to all sorts of cunning schemes to work out their cases, and finally he had gone to Milton's house and pretended to be looking for a ball he had thrown over into their backyard, and he had found this old shoe in a pile of rubbish, just as he had expected he would. To make sure that it belonged to Dr. Milton he had asked Mrs. Milton if it was one that any of them had mislaid, and she had told him that it was one of her husband's old ones that she had thrown away as it was almost worn out.

"I hated to convict her husband on her evidence," Oscar said; "but you know a detective has to steel his heart against all sentiment. And there you are!"

"But that isn't finding the horse," I objected. I still didn't believe Dr. Milton was guilty. It didn't seem at all like him, to me.

"No," Oscar said, "but I'm going to find the horse. Don't you forget that."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"How?" I asked.

"I know how to go where it is."

"If you know, why don't you go?"

"Because I've got to bide my time. Preacher Milton will have to lead me there."

I laughed. It seemed so ridiculous to me.

"But he'll do it," Oscar said, in dead earnest.

"Look here, Johnny, do you know that he got a mysterious letter out of the post-office the other day, while Mr. Colquhoun was away? And do you know that that same evening he hired a horse and buggy at the livery-stable and drove north and didn't get back until after ten o'clock?"

"Ho, nonsense! He often has to go out into the country to weddings and suppers, and to see sick people that want him to pray."

"But look here, why should he get this letter while Mr. Colquhoun was away, and why should he meet Mr. Colquhoun on the street yesterday afternoon and pretend to be so glad to see him, and walk off down street with him, talking real confidential and nodding his head?"

"Why, they often talk together. They like each other."

"Huh! That was just to throw Colquhoun off the track. And why should those two men meet Mr. Davis on the street and stop him and

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

shake hands with him, and then all three of them talk together?"

"Maybe it was about An—" I began, and then thought of my promise. "About some church work," I finished. Oscar was so interested in what he was thinking about, though, that he didn't notice my break.

"No, sir, you mark my words. It's my belief that that horse and Annie Davis are both mixed up some way. I don't know why, but I feel it in my bones," Oscar said, packing up his plaster cast and the shoe as he talked. "I'm going to keep my eye on Preacher Milton, Johnny, and some of these times when he drives out of town, I'm going to follow him. He always drives the pokiest old horse he can get, so it won't be hard to keep up with him."

Of course, I felt sure that Oscar was talking foolishness. But then there was the plaster footprint, and Dr. Milton's shoe did fit it exactly. I didn't think much of Oscar's theory about why he drove out of town, because he was always doing that every once in a while, as I said to Oscar. Still, when you came to think of it, how did it happen that his shoe fit the footprint? I didn't like to suspect Dr. Milton. Why, one time when I was sick with malaria he had come to see me, and I was awful afraid he would ask me if I wanted him

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to pray for me or talk about my soul, or something like that, but he didn't. He just sat on the edge of the bed and told me little stories that were kind of funny, and said how all the other boys were missing me and I must hurry up and get well. Anyhow, Oscar couldn't make me believe but what there was a lot of good in him, at any rate.

XI

“WHERE’S your bicycle?” Oscar asked me when I went over to his house Monday evening after supper.

“Bicycle?” I said.

“Yes. Think we’re going to follow our man on foot, with him driving a horse? Oh, you’d certainly make a dandy detective, Johnny! Chase home and get it right away.”

I knew right away he was talking about following Preacher Milton, and though I didn’t take much stock in his theory, I wanted to go along, of course, and see what happened. So I went back home and got my wheel and rode down to Oscar’s again. I was ready to start at once, but he sat down and drew a map of the country north of town, and then figured it all out this way:

“He always drives straight north. When he strikes the river road he has to turn either east or west. If he turns west he can’t turn off again for two miles, unless he turns into some lane. If he goes east he can make three

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

turns within a mile. It won't do for us to follow him right out of town, but on our wheels we can beat him to the river road even if we have to ride a mile farther than he drives, by going out the Sidney pike to the Millcreek school-house, then cutting in on the old mud road, which is dry and smooth now, to the river road. Then one of us can stop there to see if he passes, and the other post himself half a mile east of the pike on the river road."

"Why can't we both wait where the pike joins the river road?" I asked, because I didn't like to wait around all by myself after dark at either of the places Oscar spoke of.

"Well, I suppose we can."

"Come on then, Oscar, let's get started."

"Now you are showing your smoothness, aren't you? Want to start right out now. Might as well tell everybody in town what we are up to, or like as not throw Preacher Milton into alarm and keep him from going. The thing for us to do is to go down-town and loaf around a while, and keep our eyes peeled to see when he starts, then get away as quietly as we can."

I saw right off that Oscar's plan was the wisest, so we got on our wheels and rode down street, and stopped in front of the barber-shop, where there was a crowd of the fellows as

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

usual. Inside, Chunkey Collins was playing the guitar. Chunkey can certainly make that old box talk. He has a cappy diastro (I never can learn how to spell that thing, but if you ask for it by that name you will get it)—he has a cappy diastro that he clamps on just above the third fret, and that makes it sound a good deal higher without any danger of breaking the strings from twisting them up too much. I got him to play the “Battle of Sevastopol.” You know that is a piece that is played on the guitar that tells all about that battle. First, there is sort of a song, like as if the soldiers were singing and marching into camp. Then the music gets real low and dreamy like—that is when they go to sleep. And real quick there is a bugle-call. Chunkey twists his hand pretty near double sliding it up and down the strings to make them sound awful mournful when the bugle is supposed to blow, and then right away he swings into the battle, and he plays with his thumb and fingers both and imitates the cannons with the heel of his hand on the box itself. And when he finishes he wipes the sweat off his forehead with his hand, and everybody tells him that surely is fine work, but he just smiles and says he isn’t in practice any more.

He was just finishing the “Battle of Sevasto-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

pol" when Oscar poked me in the side, and when I looked around he jerked his head for me to follow him. I looked up the street, and there was Dr. Milton driving off in a phaeton buggy pulled by a joggy old horse. Dr. Milton was sitting kind of bent over like he always is when he is driving, and the lines were hanging loose in his hands. I guess the horse must have known who was driving it, for it was like the one Mr. Bashford tells about that could trot all day in the shade of one tree. Oscar and I edged away from the fellows and hopped on our wheels and rode south to the railroad, then turned west and came around a couple of blocks, then struck the Sidney pike and let ourselves out. It was a mighty pretty evening. The sun was just going down, and all the sky was red, with gold and silver streaks through it. Everything was so peaceful that it was hard for me to realize that we were riding away on a task of great importance, no doubt. At least Oscar thought it was.

We struck the old mud road at the Millcreek school-house, and from there on we had a pretty lonesome trip to the river road, because that part of our trip was through a very quiet neighborhood, and it was beginning to get dark. Over in the woods at the side of the road it was already real dark. We rode pretty

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

fast along there. We turned into the river road, and in no time were at the place where the pike meets it. Dr. Milton wasn't yet in sight. From where we were we could see about a mile up the pike, it being a long hill down to the river road. By this time it was so near dark that we could just have made out a horse and buggy if one had been in sight.

We climbed over the fence, leaving our bicycles lying in the grass, and sat down on a log to wait. Back of us was the river. We were in a little woods lot. Were you ever in a woods near a river, all by yourself, or just with one other fellow, at night? If you are at all scary, it is apt to be a creepy place. The trees seem to whisper among themselves, and the river keeps a-mumbling and a-grumbling as if it wanted to know why you were fooling around when it wanted to go to sleep. And if you look over your shoulder you will see an animal or a man standing about twenty feet away from you, but it turns out to be a stump or a tree if you look long enough. I was beginning to think how nice it was in town, where all the street-lamps would be lit by this time, when Oscar whispered so quick that I jumped to my feet and then sat down again. He said:

“Here he comes!”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Sure enough, I could hear that old horse coming, clump, clump, clump, along the pike. Pretty soon I could see it like a moving shadow, and as it kept drawing nearer I could see the shape of the buggy, and then it slowed up to turn into the river road. I thought sure it would go west, but it turned east and went, clump, clump, and rattle, rattle, on.

Oscar and I were over the fence in a minute, and I struck a match and lit my bicycle lantern. He did the same for his, then took out a couple of pieces of black cloth from his pocket and tied them over the lanterns.

“What’s that for?” I asked.

“Suppose I’m going to have him look back and see our two lights bobbing along on his trail?”

“Then let’s put out the lights.”

“Not on your life. We’ll need them later on, and maybe we won’t have time then to stop to light them.”

We hopped on the wheels and rolled along after the buggy. Now I understood why Oscar had wanted the bicycles. If we had tried to follow on foot we would have been played out already, no doubt, and, anyway, if we had tried to run along after the buggy the chances were we would have been heard. But the bicycles ran through the dust without

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

making the least bit of noise. Oscar had tightened up the chains and all the nuts, so that nothing rattled. It was just light enough, sort of half dark, so that we could keep the buggy in sight and watch out for rocks or bumps in the road. Dr. Milton seemed to be taking his time about his driving, and we did not have to pedal very hard at all to keep behind him.

"I wonder who else that is in the buggy?" Oscar said to me after we got fairly started.

"Who else? I didn't see anybody else."

"There were two people in that buggy."

"Two?"

"Sure. Didn't you see them?"

"Why, I didn't think to—"

"I might have known you wouldn't think to look." Oscar sniffed in disgust with me, and I felt ashamed of myself, so I couldn't think of anything to say in the way of an excuse.

We kept along for a mile or two this way, and then the buggy turned north again, taking the road that follows the river for a long ways.

"Where can he be going?" I asked Oscar.

"I'll never tell you till we get there, but you bet I'll see where he goes."

"The only town up this way is Freedom, and that is away off from this road. He ought

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to have taken the other turn if he is going there."

"He's not going there. Look out for that stick!"

But it was too late, and my front wheel struck the stick and I took a tumble. Oscar had stopped and was back beside me as soon as I was up. My lantern hadn't gone out, and the wheel wasn't hurt, but I had bruised my knee a little.

"Keep your eyes open, Johnny. It won't do to be crippled on this—listen!"

We both kept still. From behind us we could hear the sound of another horse and buggy. It was jogging along at a pretty good clip.

"This is mysterious," Oscar said, getting on his wheel again.

I mounted and rode up beside him, and said I supposed it was just some farmer driving to a party.

"There aren't enough farmers along this road to be having a party to-night. There are only three houses in the next five miles. That buggy back of us has something to do with the one in front of us. We must now watch that neither one of them detects us."

It was ticklish work after that for a while. First the front buggy would seem to drop back

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and we would have to slow up and let it get a lead, and by that time the other rig would be rattling up to us and we would have to spurt almost to the front one. It was getting darker and darker, and the road was getting rougher and rougher. Two or three times I almost rode into the ditch, after striking something and wabbling to get my balance again, but Oscar never had any trouble at all. He didn't appear to give any attention to the wheel or the road. He kept his eyes on the buggy in front and his ears open for the one behind. Finally the front buggy went out of sight over a hill, and when we had topped the hill and rode down about a half a mile it wasn't in view at all. Neither was the other one following us.

"Gone to cover," Oscar said, getting off and turning around and looking back the way we had come.

"We passed a lane just this side of the top of the hill," I told him.

"They must have turned in there."

We rode back and went slowly up the lane. Soon we came upon a buggy — not the one that had been in front, though. But ahead of that we could see a light, and all at once the other buggy bobbed across in front of the light. We were within a hundred yards of the house where the light was.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Get off here," Oscar whispered. We stopped and dragged our wheels to the fence and dropped them in the grass, then climbed through the fence and sneaked along it to an orchard. It was no trouble to crawl through the orchard to the fence between it and the yard about the house. We reached there just as the first buggy stopped at the gate.

"What's that noise in the orchard?" we heard some one ask.

"Pigs, I suppose," said another voice. It was Dr. Milton then, but I didn't recognize the first voice.

The second buggy came to a stop and whoever was in it climbed out. One of them was a woman.

"Well, here you are," said the first voice. I knew it then. It was the Emigger.

Oscar reached over and dug me in the side to show me that he had tumbled to who it was; then he hitched himself carefully over to where I was lying, and whispered:

"Colquhoun and Preacher Milton in the first buggy. Who was in the second?"

"Don't know."

"Looks mighty funny. They're going into the house."

Three men and a woman walked slowly up the path to the front-door. Oscar and I rose

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

up on our knees and peeped through the fence. The Emigger knocked at the door and some one opened it and let them in silently. Then another light appeared in a window on the first floor. I turned to whisper to Oscar, but he had slipped through the fence and was wriggling on his hands and knees and stomach up to the house. I went after him. We crawled up under the window where the light was, and raised up as cautiously as we could. There was nobody in the room but one person. That was a woman who was sitting in a chair with her back to us. Just as we looked in, the door of the room opened and the woman we had seen going up from the gate to the house walked into the light. It was Mrs. Davis. The woman in the chair jumped to her feet and turned so that we saw the side of her face, and cried:

“Mother!”

Annie Davis fell into her mother's arms, and the Emigger and Dr. Milton and Mr. Davis came into the room. All of them crowded up to the two women. Annie had her face on her mother's shoulder and seemed to be crying. Mrs. Davis was patting her shoulder and stroking her hair and kissing her, and tears were running down her cheeks. Then she looked down at Annie's face and said some-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

thing real quick. Annie's eyes were shut and her face was white. Another woman came into the room, looked, then ran right out and came back with a pitcher of water. The Emigger and Mr. Davis took Annie and laid her on the sofa, and the other woman poured a little water on her face. Pretty soon Annie gasped and opened her eyes and held out her arms, and her father and mother knelt down beside her and hugged her and kissed her, while the Emigger and Preacher Milton turned and looked the other way. Oscar and I slipped to the ground and crawled back to the orchard. Somehow or other my eyes were full of tears, and I had to choke something down in my throat before I could say to Oscar:

"How do you suppose she got here?"

Oscar didn't make any reply, and I looked at him. He was sitting with his face in his hands blubbering like a baby. So I didn't choke the next something down in my throat. But pretty soon we got over it, and then Oscar said:

"I know whose place this is now."

"Whose?"

"It's Milo Davis's farm. He is Annie's uncle, you know. I might have guessed this."

XII

WE sat there by the orchard fence for the longest time. Once we crept back to the house and looked in at the window again. The folks were sitting around talking earnestly. When we looked in the Emigger was arguing something. Mrs. Davis and Annie both were dabbing their eyes with their handkerchiefs. We slipped away from the window and back to the orchard, because we were afraid some one would come out and see us. We didn't know what they might do to us. But we were bound to wait there and find out what they did. We talked to each other in whispers. We couldn't understand how Annie Davis came there. Oscar figured out half a dozen theories, but none of them explained it. A theory is all right, it seems, when the object of it isn't within reach. You can send out theories just like a spider does the lines of its web, until they strike something; but when you try to spin a web to connect two points that have a brick wall between them you fall down.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Well," I whispered, "one thing's sure. She came here from that place near Cincinnati where you saw her."

"I know that," Oscar said. "Anybody could see that. But the point is, How did she get here?"

"I'm not a detective," I told him, kind of sharp like. "I'm just a newspaper man—or will be some day. All that interests me is what really is, not what might have been before it was."

Oscar sniffed and picked up an apple that he had found in the grass, and said he wished it was light enough for him to see whether it was wormy or not, because he was hungry. Finally he began eating it, but he stopped pretty soon. I asked him why he didn't finish it.

"Make too much noise chewing," he said, but his voice sounded sick. "'Fraid they would hear me if they came out."

The door of the house opened then, and we could see somebody coming out. First came Annie and her mother and father, then the Emigger and Dr. Milton. The Davises all got into their buggy and said good-night to the Milo Davises. The Emigger and Dr. Milton told them good-night, too, and then both buggies started down the lane towards the road.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Oscar and I sneaked through the orchard and along the lane fence to where we had left our wheels. When the buggy with Annie and her folks in it went by us, we could hear her sort of half laughing and half crying, and her mother talking soft and happy to her. We waited until we were sure both buggies had turned into the road, and then got on our wheels and followed them. Instead of going west, though, we struck off east and found another road that let us into town by way of the pike without having to overtake and pass them. We took the black cloths off our lanterns and skimmed along as fast as we could push the pedals. My knee had got stiffened while we were lying in the grass, and it hurt like fury every time I pushed the pedal, but I didn't say anything.

Before we struck the pike we had to pass the Baptist graveyard. When we were getting near to it, I remembered how people had said that John Trimble's ghost haunted it. He used to be marshal of the town, but was killed when I was a little boy by a man he was trying to arrest. The moon was just coming up, and I tell you the tombstones looked scary. There are a lot of weeping-willow-trees scattered among the graves, and the wind made their branches swing back and forth, and if

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

you didn't know there wasn't any such thing as ghosts, you would be sure that something white was fluttering back and forth the way the shadows went in and out on the monuments. We had just got past the graveyard when we heard a rustle over inside of it, and something yelled:

"Hi there!"

I forgot all about my sore knee and everything else. The skin on my head felt just like your hand does when you are getting an electric shock. My breath went out of me all at once, and my legs were as flabby and weak as if they were rags. But I kept that bicycle humming. Oscar's cap fell off. He never stopped to pick it up. When we got half a mile away we slowed down and Oscar began chuckling.

"I know who that was," he said.

"John Trimble?" I asked. I must have been cold, for my teeth were chattering.

"No. I just happened to think that Andy Logan is watching the grave of old Mr. Wheeler. You know the doctors didn't know exactly what he died of, and his folks are afraid his grave will be robbed."

That didn't make me feel any better. I was glad when we got over the top of the hill and could see the lights in town. It was mid-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

night now, at least, and there weren't any lights but the street-lamps, and everybody is always kicking because they don't give enough light, but that night they surely did look cheerful. I slowed down and was ready to get off when we came to Oscar's house, but he whispered to come on. So I kept up with him. He rode on down-town and then to where Annie Davis's folks lived. There he got off and blew out his bicycle lamp, and told me to do the same.

"Aren't you going home?" I asked.

"Johnny, don't you suppose our next move is to ascertain whether or not Annie Davis comes home?"

I kicked about this, but Oscar had his way. We ran our wheels down the alley and sat there on some stones. Pretty soon we both began nodding and blinking. It was deathly still all over town. Once in a while you could hear a horse kick the side of its stall or a dog bark; and then after a while we heard a clock strike one.

Next thing I knew Oscar was shaking me by the shoulder and whispering that they were coming. Just one buggy came. It was the Davises. Annie and her mother got out, and her father went to the front-door with them and let them in. Then he went back to the

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

buggy, and quick as a flash I thought of what he was going to do. He was going to put the horse and buggy in his stable and would have to come right down the alley where we were. I told Oscar to come on, jumped on my wheel, and started. He understood what I was doing, jumped on his wheel, and we sailed out of that alley and right in front of Mr. Davis's horse's nose. It snorted and jumped, and he yelled at us, but we humped ourselves and were around the corner before he could catch his breath. Then we went to Ferguson's, put our wheels in the woodshed, and slipped into the house. Mr. Ferguson came into the hall in his night-shirt and asked where in the world we young rascals had been.

"Bicycling," Oscar said.

"I don't see why that should keep you out to this hour of the night."

"Johnny fell off his wheel, and we had to wait to fix it."

"Hurt you, Johnny?"

I showed him my pants leg. It was torn where I had struck my knee, and I guess by this time Mr. Ferguson had noticed that I was limping. He said for us to get into Oscar's room and get to bed right away, and he would settle with us in the morning. Oscar said, after we got undressed, not to worry about

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

what his pa said, as he always talked that way. My knee looked pretty bad. It had been cut some, and the dirt had got into it, and it was turning all black and blue. I could hardly bend it. Just when we were climbing into bed, though, Mrs. Ferguson came in with a lamp and asked to see my knee.

“Goodness me!” she said. “You surely wasn’t going to bed with your knee in that shape.”

I told her it didn’t amount to anything, but she made me wait while she went to the kitchen and got a pan of water and some soap and a towel, and came back and washed the sore place, and then she rubbed some liniment into it. That made it feel better. Mrs. Ferguson is a pretty good sort of a woman.

Oscar and I had hard work getting to sleep, though. There was too much to talk about. Finally we decided that the Emigger had really found Annie the time that he went away, just after Oscar located her, and that he got her to come from wherever she was and stay at her uncle’s.

After that Oscar didn’t say anything for quite a while, and I thought he had gone to sleep, but all at once he rose up in bed and smacked one fist into the other hand and mumbled:

“Say, Johnny, who stole that horse?”

XIII

MR. BASHFORD says that some folks draw a moral like a dentist draws a tooth; they don't know how much it hurts. And that was the way with a lot of people when the word got around that Annie Davis was at home.

The news of her return didn't get out for a while. There wasn't any particular reason why it should, unless she should appear on the street, or her folks would tell it, or Oscar or I or Mr. Colquhoun or Dr. Milton should announce it. Oscar didn't say anything, because he and I had agreed to keep mum, for we didn't want to have to explain how we knew about it. And the Emigger never talked much to any one about affairs he was mixed up in. The Davises are quiet people, and it stood to reason that they wouldn't tell anything right out, but would just let folks find out the best way they could. Kitsey Morrey was the first one to see Annie that day, and he saw her on their side porch late in the

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

afternoon and came running up street to tell the news. Kitsey is tongue-tied. His real name is Arthur Morrey, but we nicknamed him "Kitsey" because that is the way he tries to say "Christmas."

Lafe Skidmore and Squire Miller and some others were standing and sitting around Jordan's store, when Kitsey Morrey came running up and trying to say something. When Kitsey gets excited it is awful hard for him to talk, and this time he was not only excited, but out of breath from running. He puffed and sizzed and choked, and caught Mr. Jordan by the arm and pointed back down street towards Davis's house.

"What's the matter, Kitsey?" Mr. Jordan asked.

Kitsey stuttered and stammered and sizzed some more.

"What's the matter with you, boy?" asked Ira Growley. "Swaller a fire-cracker?"

Kitsey gurgled and gasped and shook his head and pointed again.

"Well, great snakes!" Squire Miller said. "Go down to the fish-market and set on a cake of ice till you cool down, Kitsey. Then come back and get it off your mind."

This time Kitsey managed to say something that sounded like "Annie Davis."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

They all jumped up and crowded around him. Kitsey got more excited than ever.

"What is it, Kitsey? What about Annie Davis?" Mr. Jordan asked.

Kitsey waved his hand towards the Davises house, and choked all up trying to say what he wanted to.

"What!" Ira Growley yelled. "Is she there?"

Kitsey's head bobbed up and down, and they all looked towards Davis's house as if they thought they would see her. Lafe Skidmore had started down street already. As soon as he got near a bunch of men he would say sort of unconcernedly:

"Annie Davis just got home."

"What? Quit your kiddin'," they would answer.

"Yep. Fact. She's down there at the house now."

The word got around fast. It wasn't ten minutes before you could see people coming out of their gates and starting to walk, as if they were just taking a promenade to enjoy the cool evening. They would saunter down Main Street, then some way or other they always found it necessary to go by Davis's house. But they didn't see Annie. I expect she saw them. I know she did, for afterwards

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

she told my mother that she sat behind the curtains at her window and watched them passing the house, and that she felt worse then than she had at any time since she left home. She said she felt like slipping away and running off again, but she thought of her father and mother, and how it would make them feel. When she thought of them, she said, she felt worse than ever about having run away. Her father and mother looked ten years older, they had worried so much. Folks say that Mr. Davis, although he let on that there wasn't anything wrong, had scarcely slept at all during the time Annie was away, and that Mrs. Davis had cried and cried so much over Annie's being gone that her eyes had nearly failed and she had had to get glasses to wear.

I used to think it would be a fine thing to run away with a circus, and maybe come back here after a few years and astonish everybody by riding around the ring all dressed up in fine tights and things like that, and have all the boys envying me when I jumped through the paper hoops or turned airsprings and lit on the horse again, but if it would make my folks feel so bad about it I don't believe I would do it. Of course, now that I am a journalist, I don't have any more ideas of going with a circus or being a soldier or a railroad man. But

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I forgot I was telling about how the people acted about Annie's being home again.

After supper that evening pa came home and told ma that Annie had got back. He had heard it down street of course. I had to go into my bedroom and laugh to myself when I heard them discussing it, and wondering how she came home, and where she had been, and everything like that. Ma and Mrs. Davis have always been close friends, and so she said she would go over there after a while and tell Mrs. Davis how glad she was that her daughter was home again. I went with her when she went. Pa wouldn't go. He said they would be bothered to death with people running in to quiz them, and he wouldn't have the name of a he-gossip. Of course, he knew that ma was going simply because she was such a friend of Mrs. Davis. She really was. So, as I said, I went along. The house was dark, all except a light in the sitting-room, and the curtains were pulled down at the windows. Ma knocked at the side door, and when Mr. Davis came to the door she said:

"It's me, Mr. Davis—Mrs. Thompson."

"Oh, it's you, Elizabeth?" My mother's name is Elizabeth. "Come right in. Annie will be glad to see you." He meant Mrs. Davis. Her name is Annie, too.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

We went in. Mrs. Davis came and shook hands with ma, and right behind her was Annie.

"Why, Annie!" ma said. "It's nice to see you at home again."

"And I'm glad to be home," Annie said, softly. She seemed to be about to cry, and ma put her arm around her and kissed her, and patted her on the shoulder and said:

"There, there. Don't you say another word. Just sit down and let me look at you. You certainly do look well."

But Annie looked up and saw me and said:

"Why, Johnny, how do you do?"

I shook hands with her and couldn't think of anything to say. I felt kind of guilty.

We all sat down, and ma began talking right away. I tell you, I was proud of my mother that evening. She just went ahead and talked as if Annie had never been away at all, and as if she knew everything that had been going on, and before long Annie seemed to forget that she had been away, and then they were all talking away with one another as comfortable as you please, about Mrs. Anderson's new dress that she had bought in Cincinnati, and Flora Beavers' latest premium, a patent bread-mixer, and all the news of that sort that the women talk about and that isn't of enough importance to put in the papers.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

While they were talking I had a good chance to study Annie and see how she looked. She seemed to have grown up a good deal while she was away. Before she had looked like a girl, and now she looked a young woman. And she was prettier than ever. Her hair is light, you know, and she had it twisted up on top of her head; and her cheeks, which had been white when we came in, got all pink and natural looking, and her eyes began to twinkle again, and the corners of her mouth quit turning down. She certainly did look pretty. Mr. Davis, too, seemed to have changed already. His shoulders had straightened up and that sad look was gone out of his eyes. Mrs. Davis just sat and rocked and smiled and listened while ma and Annie talked. Ma never asked a single question about where Annie had been nor how she happened to come home. Mrs. Davis started once or twice to say something about it, but she switched off. While they were talking there was a knock at the door, and Annie got up and started to it.

"Hadn't I better go, Annie?" her mother asked.

"No, mamma, I'll go," she said, and went to the door and opened it.

The Emigger came in. Annie's cheeks got pinker than ever, and she shook hands with

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

the Emigger as if she hadn't seen him since she got back. That looked sort of funny to me. The Emigger spoke to us, and then Annie led the way for him into the parlor and lit the lamp, as if he was a beau of hers. Ma got up and said we must be getting home. Mrs. Davis said not to be in a hurry, but ma said no, that we really must go, and we told them good-night and left.

"I was surprised to see Mr. Colquhoun come there to-night," I said to ma while we were walking home.

"He looked a little bit surprised when he saw us—or you," she said, and laughed.

On the way home we met Mrs. Anderson, and she walked along with us; and a little farther on we met Orphena Green, and she turned around and came with us. They came into the house and sat down for a little while, and then Flora Banford and Miss Beavers came, too. Then some more women dropped in, and pa excused himself and went out on the side porch. I stayed in the parlor with them. Of course they all began talking about Annie Davis right away.

"I hear that she looks as if she was at the point of death," Miss Banford said.

"Not a bit of it," ma told her. "She's better looking than ever."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Does any one know where she really has been?" Mrs. Anderson asked.

"I understand," Flora Beavers said, "that she has been at her uncle Milo's for a good while."

"At Milo Davis's?" Orphena Green exclaimed. "Why, do you know, I saw a strange woman there when we drove by one afternoon about two weeks ago, and I thought at the time that she had a familiar look."

Then they got to telling all they had heard, and not one of them was anywhere near the truth. It was funny to listen to, and I thought what a sensation it would make if I would tell what I knew. But I kept quiet and pretended to be reading a magazine.

"They say she has been with a big theatrical company," Miss Banford said. Then Orphena Green had heard that she had been working in a department store, and the others had heard something else, and so it went, until one of them mentioned Branthorpe's name. Then Mrs. Anderson drew in her breath and wagged her head wisely.

"Girls will be foolish," she sighed. "I've often said that Mrs. Davis wasn't raising Annie as she should be. It's an awful blight on her name to have eloped with that actor as she did."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I couldn't stand that. I just blurted out, "She never saw Branthorpe after he left here."

They all turned and looked at me in surprise, and ma told me I was very impolite to contradict Mrs. Anderson. Mrs. Anderson, you know, is very heavy set, and she sort of panted and glared at me as if I had called her a liar. But I didn't like the way she had said what she did, and I repeated that Annie Davis hadn't seen Branthorpe after he had left town so hurriedly.

"How do you know, Johnny?" ma asked.

"I can't tell you how I know. It's a secret, but it's the truth. Annie Davis never saw him any more. And she hasn't been on the stage, and she hasn't been working in a store—and there hasn't been any time all summer that she couldn't have come home in half a day."

"Well, mercy me! If you knew all this, why didn't you tell it?" Orphena Green asked.

"Oh, Johnny and Oscar Ferguson have been playing detective," said Flora Beavers, smiling, "and they really did find out a great deal. I think Johnny is speaking the truth, Mrs. Anderson, for I have heard the same thing from a different source."

"You have? Well, Flora Beavers, I can't see why you haven't told us, then," Mrs. Anderson replied. "Where did you hear so much?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I'm like Johnny. It isn't fair to tell."

"Well, it's simply a mercy that the poor girl is home again, safe and sound," Mrs. Anderson said. "And it is a blessing she didn't fall into the hands of that man Branthorpe. Women have a hard fate in this life, anyway. They are simply the toys of men. Simply toys!" And she looked like she does when she talks about souls and spirits and mahatmas and things like that.

I had to snicker when she said that women were toys, and I couldn't help thinking how she would look swinging from a Christmas-tree or sticking out of some one's stocking. She weighs two or three hundred pounds, I don't know which, and if she was a toy it would keep anybody busy to keep her from falling against him and hurting him.

Then they talked a little bit about some other things, but before long they got around to Annie Davis again. They knew we had been over there, and they tried to pump ma and find out something, but she told them the truth, that she hadn't asked anything about where Annie had been, or what she had done, or when she came home.

"I shall go down there to-morrow morning," Mrs. Anderson said. "I feel ashamed of myself for not running right down there

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to-night, as an old friend should have done. But I thought perhaps they would rather be left alone in their happiness this evening."

I could see that ma didn't like that remark, but everybody is used to the way Mrs. Anderson talks, and she said nothing. They all began to say they must be going home, and Orphena Green, Miss Banford, and Mrs. Anderson went out together. The other women got on their hats and went one by one, until Flora Beavers was the only one left.

"I expect Johnny had better go part of the way with you, Flora, unless your mother was intending to drive in for you," ma said, when Flora began talking about going.

"Oh no. I wouldn't trouble him."

Pa came in from the side porch just then and asked if the jury had handed in a verdict. He pretended to be surprised to see Miss Beavers still there, and then said:

"I wondered why Bashford insisted on sitting on the porch with me and keeping me up so late."

Miss Beavers laughed, and told pa he thought he was awful bright, and then Mr. Bashford came in and said he had just happened to be walking around our way, as he needed some exercise, and that a stroll out as far as Beavers' would do him good, so he would take Flora home.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“What did I tell you?” pa said, as soon as they were gone.

“I could have told you long before that,” ma said.

When I asked what they meant, they said I mustn't always be looking for news, and that it was time for me to get to bed.

XIV

DID you ever notice how the school-bell seems to taunt you when it rings the first morning of the beginning of school? It has been quiet all summer, but it seems as if it has been watching you having a good time, or at least knew that you were feeling glad because you didn't have it ding-donging at you all the time; and when it once more gets the right to give you orders, it rings with an I-told-you-I'd-get-you tone. That was the way it sounded to Oscar and me Monday morning, and we had to start back to school. I realized then what a lot of fun I had had, even working as I had been in the printing-office. A fellow may have to work twice as many hours in the day as he has to put in at school, but work doesn't seem like studying and reciting. Professor Jones gave us a nice talk, full of long words, and got all mixed up trying to tell us a helpful anecdote that even Oscar, with all his detective talent, couldn't have found the moral in when the professor got through with it.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Then we got our lessons assigned to us, and settled down to school-work. Mr. Bashford was right, though, when he said that setting type would be an education for me. I found that it wasn't half as hard to get my lessons or to understand them as it used to be.

After school I went to the office and worked until supper-time. This only gave me a couple hours on school-days, but by this time I had gotten to be a pretty good type-setter, and could do a good deal of work. Then, on Friday night, I came back to the office as usual after supper and helped run off the paper and paste and wrap the copies that were to be mailed. The Emigger was working harder than ever now. Mr. Bashford joked him a good deal about it, saying that he must have some new sort of ambition to cause him to apply himself so closely to his duties; and the Emigger joked back at Mr. Bashford, telling him that he was buckling down to work as if his youth had been renewed, too.

The week rolled around pretty quick, to my notion, what with my being at school and at work at the same time, and I was glad when Saturday came. There wasn't so very much work to be done after taking the papers to the post-office, just distribute type and wash the rollers and clean up generally, and maybe at-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

tend to some job-work that had to be done. Saturday Mr. Bashford and the Emigger usually stayed in the office all day, talking with country people who came in to pay their subscriptions, and chatting with them about the premiums they got at the fair, and about their wheat and corn and hogs and things. Mr. Bashford was pretty good at this, but the Emigger could beat him all hollow when it came to getting on the good side of the farmers. Usually he could recollect some one of the same name that used to live in Virginia, and then he was still a curiosity to most of them. He still wore his broad-brimmed black slouch-hat and black Prince Albert suit, and he always knew a funny story to tell. The first Saturday afternoon after I had resumed my school duties, Oscar came into the office and asked me if I couldn't get off to go swimming. I said I was afraid not, as I had five hundred sale bills to run off.

"Well, there isn't going to be much more swimming this year," Oscar said; "and some of the fellows are going up to the bend this afternoon. Better come along."

"It must be pretty rough water there today," I said.

It had been raining for a couple of days before, and had cleared off that morning, and the

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

creek was high. The bend is narrow and deep in the middle, and the water, when there has been a rain, goes through mighty fast, sometimes rolling in regular billows away out in the centre.

"Of course it is rough," Oscar said. "That will make it all the more fun."

Mr. Bashford and the Emigger had heard Oscar and me talking, and Mr. Bashford said: "It will be all right, Johnny. Go along, if you want to. Maybe Oscar can get a new clew about Mr. Colquhoun's horse up there. Say, Oscar, have you dropped that case?"

"I never drop a case, Mr. Bashford, until it is closed," Oscar replied.

"I'd plumb forgotten that horse," the Emigger laughed. "I wonder what really did become of the animal. I had just concluded to name him Blasted Hope or something equally expressive, when he disappeared."

"I'll find that horse yet, Mr. Colquhoun," Oscar said.

"If you do, you may have him for your fee. Tell you what I believe I'll do. Believe I'll go along to the bend with the boys and look on for a while. I haven't seen a bunch of them in swimming for a long time."

So we three started out together, leaving Mr. Bashford to run the office. It seemed

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

pretty good to have the Emigger along; it was like old times. He thought of that, too, and spoke of it while we were cutting across through the fields after getting out of town. We saw a good many places that reminded him and me of the times when we drove the rag-wagon together. There were about ten of the boys at the bend when we got there; they were paddling around close to the shore. Out in the middle of the creek the water was rolling high, and it looked dangerous. After it sweeps around the bend the creek gets shallow and runs over a lot of bowlders and sand for about half a mile. But in the bend itself there are places where you can hardly touch bottom when you dive. Oscar and I got out of our clothes, and the Emigger sat down and lighted a cigar. He said it would be more fun for him to watch us than to go in himself. We jumped in. The water was chilly at first, but once we were used to it it was nice. After splashing and paddling about near the shore, we got to swimming out towards the rough water and then back again.

“Better be careful, boys,” the Emigger cautioned us.

So then we got in line and held hands and waded out as far into the rough water as we could. The boy on the end of the line would

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

keep right on until he got to the drop-off in the middle, where he would go down over his head, and then the rest of us would pull him in. Four or five of the boys had done this, and then it came my turn. I kept on going out, and when I reached the drop-off I began to tread water, for I wanted to go out farther than any of the others. I managed to get right into the edge of the billows, and Oscar called to me to start back. He had hold of my hand and could feel that his feet were on the drop-off, and knew that I must be beyond my depth. I turned half-way to start back, when a big wave struck me in the face and I lost my breath and my hands flew up, and there I was! I can swim, but the water was too swift for me. I tried my best to strike out for the shore, but every time I made a stroke a wave hit me in the face—and my mouth was open and I choked and strangled. I heard Oscar yelling:

“Come on out, Johnny!”

I could see that he was nearly to the bank, and I almost had to laugh, thinking how foolish it was for him to say that, when he ought to know that I wasn't staying out there being rolled and tumbled over and over for the fun of the thing. I tried to tell him so, but some more water got into my mouth, and I realized that I had better save my breath. So I made

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

another effort to swim, but it was no use, and then I got a cramp in my arm and went under.

When I came up I had been carried downstream, and I knew I was a goner if some one didn't come to help me. I shouted "Help!" or tried to shout it, but when I got the word half out I went under the water again, and it was just like "He-bubble-bubble!" I knew I was in a mighty dangerous place, but at the same time I noticed everything the boys and the Emigger were doing. Some way it was more as if I was watching them, without paying any attention to myself. Oscar was climbing up the bank, and the other boys were dancing up and down in the water and calling to me to come on out. I kept going under and coming up again, and all the time I kept my legs going as hard as I could, trying to tread water and save myself. I did that without knowing why I did it. And once when I was going under I thought of how folks said that a person who was drowning always went down three times, exactly, and the third time he went down he stayed down. I thought of that, because I knew I had gone under something like half a dozen times, so that was one theory disproved. And I kept on trying to yell "Help!" I knew it wasn't any use doing that, because it wouldn't bring help; that I was so

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

far out in the stream that I would drown before any of them could get to me. But I just kept on yelling it. I suppose I did so because people who fall in the water always do it. I saw the Emigger running along the bank of the creek, down-stream, and saw that his hat was off, and that he was pulling off his coat and vest and dropping them as he ran. He wasn't calling to me at all, like the boys were. Even from as far away as I was, I could see that his face had a strange expression on it, and that he was thinking as fast as he ran. I remember his running. I remember wondering why it was I never had seen him run before, and why I never had supposed he could get up so much speed.

By this time I was turning the bend, and coming towards the bowlders, and I remember thinking of how I was going to get bumped. All this time I had kept watching for one thing. I have always read that when a person is drowning he not only goes down three times, and stays down then, but I have read that when he is drowning his past life flashes before him in a series of pictures. It does not. I kept looking for those pictures. I recollect that after the first scare of realizing that I was drowning, I got rather interested on this point, and continued to wonder what I would see

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

first. I knew I was drowning. I had a dim sort of wonder about what people would say about me, and how I would look at my funeral; but that was merely a sudden thought. It came and went in a flash. I kept kicking away with my feet, but my arms might as well have been paralyzed. From miles and miles away, then, I heard the Emigger shout:

“Keep up, Johnny! I’ll get you!”

I didn’t take any particular interest in that. I had a hazy recollection, that was all, of having known the Emigger; and I knew, too, in a general way, that if anybody tried to get me out it would be him. But I didn’t care. I kept going under oftener and oftener, and swallowing more and more water. And I grew awfully tired. It didn’t seem to be worth while to keep my legs going. What was the use? I stopped kicking, and floated along, now coming to the surface, and now going down again, first on my face and then on my back. And then I felt my feet bang against a rock and knew I had struck the bowlders. Then it was just as if you were lying down in a great, big feather-bed. Everything about me was warm and soft, and all the sky was black, with a lot of silver specks and spots in it that danced back and forth—like when you press your finger against you eye and hold it there a

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

while. And so I just seemed to lie down in that big, soft feather-bed—and then I didn't know anything more until I heard some one say:

“He's all right now.”

I looked up and the Emigger was standing over me, or stooping over me, and all the boys were standing around. Some of them were crying. All of them looked scared to death. I said:

“Hello, there!” Then I went to sleep again.

The Emigger slapped me on the cheek and said, real quick:

“Open your eyes, Johnny. Are you all right now?”

“Of course I'm all right,” I said, opening my eyes and trying to sit up. He got down on one knee and slipped his arm about me and lifted me up. My head quit buzzing and swimming around, and before long I was giggling and blinking back tears at the same time.

“Well,” I said, “I guess I won't want a drink again for a good while.”

“I guess not,” the Emigger told me. “I pumped about half the creek out of you after I dragged you to the shore.”

“Where's Oscar?” I asked, looking around, frightened. “Did he—was he drowned?”

“He went to town to get help, or to tell your folks,” Roy Stevens said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Some of the other boys came along then, bringing their clothes and mine, and the Emigger helped me dress, and the other boys got into their clothes. I noticed then that the Emigger's shirt and pants were dripping wet.

"Did you swim after me?" I asked him.

"No. I didn't have to swim. When I got to you you were drifting along in the shallows, face down, and all gone. I thought you were dead, pardner."

"Well, I'm much obliged, Mr. Colquhoun. I ought to give you a watch or a medal, I suppose, but I can't now. When I get bigger, I'll—"

"That's all right, old man," he said. "You just do as much for me if you ever get the chance, and we'll call it square."

Then my conscience commenced to hurt me. The other boys were off to one side, so I just told the Emigger about me and Oscar following him to Milo Davis's the night Annie came home. He listened quietly until I finished, then took hold of my hand and shook it and said:

"I'm glad you told me, Johnny. But I knew it all this time."

"You knew it?"

"Yes. I saw you when you were getting on your wheels after you had fallen in the road."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

But I felt better for telling him, and just then here came my folks in a buggy, driving as hard as they could down through the field. When they saw me, pa called:

“Have you got his—his body?”

“Body, boy, and all—as good as ever!” the Emigger shouted.

“What? Is he alive?”

“Yes.”

“Thank the Lord.”

Ma jumped out of the buggy and ran to me and hugged me and kissed me—and I felt ashamed, right there before all the boys. She asked about a hundred questions, and the Emigger told her and pa all about how it had happened, but said hardly anything about his taking me out. I told them:

“If Mr. Colquhoun hadn’t got to me when he did, and pulled me out, and pumped the water out of me, and got me to breathing again, I’d have been drowned.”

“Now, Mrs. Thompson,” the Emigger said, “Johnny overestimates what I did. I should have reached him long before I did, and then he would not have had such a close call. But we cannot always decide what is the best thing to do first under such circumstances.”

“Well, God bless you for what you did, Mr. Colquhoun,” ma said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Yes,” pa said. “We can’t thank you now as we would like to. After we get over the excitement we can say what we should. We had better get Johnny home, I think.”

I had to lean against pa to walk to the buggy. I was pretty weak. When we got to the rig, I saw some one sitting under the lap-robe.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Oscar Ferguson.”

“But what—?”

Then pa laughed, as if he had forgotten all about how near he had been to losing me.

“What do you suppose Oscar did?” he asked. “He ran all the way to town and right up Main Street to our house to tell us you were drowned—and he didn’t have a stitch of clothes on him! He forgot them.”

Oscar climbed out with the lap-robe around him, and hurried over where the boys had his clothes.

“Johnny scares a fellow so he don’t know what he’s doing,” he said, as he began to dress.

XV

“ I DON’T suppose you would have tried so hard to save Johnny, if you had known we owed him a week’s wages,” Mr. Bashford said to the Emigger Monday morning. The Emigger laughed, and said I was too good a hand to spare just now.

Between poking fun at Oscar because of the way he ran through town, and giving me good advice, most of the people in town were busy that day and the day before.

“Serves you right,” Squire Miller said to me.

I couldn’t figure out what he meant, but no doubt it was intended as a warning of some kind.

“Them that’s born to be hung will never get drowned,” Lafe Skidmore said.

“Next time you go swimming, keep out of the water,” was Judge Lambert’s advice.

Orphena Green told ma if she wasn’t so busy canning fruit, she would write a poem welcoming me home from a watery grave. And so it went.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

The Emigger and Mr. Bashford didn't talk very much to me about it, however, for they had something more important on their minds. Ike Peters had come into the office that afternoon, while I was at school, and had told them of some news he had heard. He had been doing some chores at Davis's, and while there he had overheard a conversation between Annie and her mother. He had gathered from it that Annie had received a letter from Arthur Keene Branthorpe. How Branthorpe knew she was at home was a mystery. Mr. Bashford had told Ike Peters to keep his tongue still and not tell anybody about what he had heard. He had given Ike a good scare, and told him he would get into all kinds of trouble.

"He may go and spread the word all over town, though," Mr. Bashford said. "He's got a brain-pan as small as a teaspoon, and it has had 'For Rent' on it ever since he was born."

"Did Ike know any particulars about the letter?" the Emigger asked.

"Particulars? What does a chuckle-head like him care for particulars? Particulars simply bother him. All he wants is a generality to set him going."

"I can't understand it," the Emigger said. He sat at his desk and studied and studied. It was plain that the news worried him. By-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and-by Mr. Bashford got up and went down street, but the Emigger still sat there and thought. After a while he called me to him and said:

“I can trust you, Johnny, I know.”

“Yes, sir. Of course you can.”

“Will you go down to Davis’s and see Annie, and ask her if she will let me see the letter she got from Branthorpe?”

I went right down there, and Annie came to the door when I rang the bell. I told her my message, and she told me to wait a minute. She went back in the house, and soon returned with a letter in her hand. She gave it to me, but as I was going down the steps she called to me:

“Wait a minute. I’ll—I’ll take it up there myself if you will wait until I get my hat on. I should like to talk with Mr. Colquhoun about it.”

So she went to the office with me. The Emigger looked surprised to see her come in. She said:

“I knew you would have come to the house if I had asked Johnny to ask you to come, but I thought maybe it would be best if I saw you here. I—I didn’t know what I wanted to do, really. I have been so nervous all day. How did you learn that this letter had come?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Ike Peters heard you and your mother talking about it and told Mr. Bashford."

"Oh, dear! Everybody in town will know it now."

"No they won't. Ike won't say anything about it to anybody else."

"Well, Mr. Colquhoun, I was terribly frightened when this letter came." She handed him the letter. "I can't imagine how the man found out I was at home again. You may read the letter if you like. I am sure you can suggest what will be best for me to do. You see, he says he is coming here, but doesn't say when."

The Emigger opened the letter and read it half aloud. I wasn't eavesdropping, but I could hear some parts of it. Besides, Annie and the Emigger didn't care if I heard it. They knew me.

Branthorpe wrote that he was awful sorry to have failed to meet Annie when she left home, but that important business matters had called him away unexpectedly from Cincinnati. Annie blushed when this part of the letter was read, for it showed that she had run away to meet Branthorpe.

"I was a very foolish girl," she said, softly.

"We are all foolish, sometime or other," the Emigger answered, and went on reading.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Branthorpe wrote a whole lot of stuff about how he had never forgotten her, and never could forget her, and how he had tried to find her in Cincinnati later and had written to her there, and how he had just learned through a friend who had been in Plainville that she was at home again. He was coming here soon, he said, and hoped then to see her. This part of the letter sounded as if he meant to see her whether or no. There was more to it than was written. Branthorpe did not say how soon he would be here, but asked her to write him to the general delivery at Cincinnati at once.

“What can I do?” Annie asked the Emigger.

“What do you want to do?” he asked her.

“Oh, I never want to see him again. If he should speak to me even, I should feel like dying of mortification. I—I feel terribly about it, Mr. Colquhoun. You can’t imagine—”

She choked with a little sob then, and she would have been crying in good earnest in another minute, if the Emigger hadn’t commenced talking cheerfully to her and telling her that she needn’t worry a bit about it, that Branthorpe should not annoy her for a minute. Then he said she would better let him walk down home with her, and they started out.

There was nothing more heard from Bran-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

thorpe in the next day or so, but Mr. Bashford and the Emigger talked a good deal about the matter. Mr. Bashford's words to Ike Peters had made him keep still and nobody else in town knew anything about the letter Annie had received. I passed her house every day going to and from school, and I saw her once or twice. She was beginning to look worried again.

Thursday of that week a man came to town to put up the posters advertising a show company that would play three nights. It was "The Thespian Repertoire Company," and the show bills were in colors, and showed heroines jumping over Niagara Falls and being dragged from in front of trains and pointing big pistols at the villain. The man came to the office and wanted to know where he could hire a couple of good boys to distribute dodgers. I told him I could do it, maybe, before school in the morning, and would get Oscar to help me.

"All right," said the man. "I'll give you both free tickets to all the performances if you will."

He got me to go to the hotel with him, and gave me an armful of the dodgers that Oscar and I were to distribute, and then he came back to the office and got Mr. Bashford to figure on printing programmes for the performances. The

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

company gave away a gold watch at each performance, and whether or not you got it depended on the number you held. You would get a numbered ticket when you went in the door. As this was sure to draw a crowd to every show, the man got up a programme filled with advertisements of most of the business houses in town. He did this the next day. It made Mr. Bashford pretty mad even if we did get the job of printing the programmes.

"Here's people taking space in this programme," he said to the Emigger, "and paying hard cash for it, too, who owe us for advertisements and subscriptions. You bet if I go away from home to buy a pair of shoestrings they give me fits for supporting foreign industries. I suppose they could crawl out of this by saying they were encouraging art and the drama."

The company was going to play "East Lynne" Monday night, "Sentenced for Life" Tuesday night, and "Ten Nights in a Bar-Room" Wednesday night. Roy Stevens was disappointed because they weren't going to play "Uncle Tom's Cabin," because whenever an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" troupe came to town he always got in for nothing, and so did all his folks, because his little brother Harry has long, curly hair, and the actors always got him for

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

the baby that Eliza carried across the ice with the blood-hounds in fierce pursuit. "Sentenced for Life" looked like it might be a good show. The bills that advertised it showed men in striped clothes working, while guards with big rifles watched them from the walls of a prison. We all knew about "Ten Nights in a Bar-Room."

The show-man came back to town Saturday morning, and had the copy for the rest of the programmes with him. I had all the advertisements set up, and left a place in the middle of the form for the programme of the plays to go. The way it was done was to put in the cast of characters and title of the play for one night, print that lot, then take out the programme part and put in the type that gave the particulars for the next night, and so on.

Each play had a synopsis which was very interesting. The one for "Sentenced for Life" went like this:

ACT I.—Palatial home of Gregory Pulvers. "Jack, what does this mean?" "This check is a forgery." "Old man, you know you lie!" "Leave this house forever." "My daughter shall never wed a forger." "The fatal blow." *Enter Marjorie.* "Heavens, Jack, what have you done!" "Forgive me. It was all a mistake." "Good-bye." "Halt! You are under arrest." *Curtain.*

ACT II.—"How do you plead, prisoner?" "Not guilty." The veiled woman in the court-room.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Where is Marjorie Pulvers?" The missing witness. The veiled woman discloses her identity. "It is my duty to testify, Jack." "Gentlemen of the jury, have you determined upon a verdict?" "Guilty." Sentenced for life. *Curtain.*

ACT III.—Outside the walls of Sing Sing. The secret message. Inside the walls. Jack in the stripes. The attempt at escape. "Out of my way!" "Halt, or you are a dead man!" "Better dead than here for life!" The shot. "Boys, be warned by my career." *Tableau and Curtain.*

I read the synopses of the shows first, and then began setting up the titles and the casts of characters. I was working on the "Sentenced for Life" programme when I came to the name of the actor who was to play Jack. I could hardly believe what I saw. I took the copy to the Emigger and showed it to him.

He looked at it for a minute, then hit the table with his fist.

"So that's the explanation!" he said.

The line I showed him read:

"Jack Simmons (sentenced for life)—

"ARTHUR KEENE BRANTHORPE."

"Find Oscar for me," the Emigger said. It wasn't much trouble to get hold of Oscar, and I brought him to the office.

"Oscar," the Emigger said to him, "I want you to do some real detective work for me,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and I want you to keep it to yourself. You remember this man Branthorpe who was here trying to get up a show last spring?"

"Yes, sir. You mean the actor that got Annie Davis to run away."

"I mean Branthorpe," said the Emigger, frowning. "I want you to find out for me when he comes to town. If you can, watch the trains, and the minute he sets foot in this town you keep your eagle eye on him. Keep watch of all his movements and report to me as often as you can."

"All right, sir."

"And I'll pay you for your trouble."

Oscar threw back his shoulders and walked out mysteriously.

XVI

OSCAR located Branthorpe the minute he stepped from the train. He reached town Sabbath afternoon with the rest of the troupe. There were ten in the company, four men and six women. There was one big, fat woman and five others of different sizes. Two of the younger ones had real fluffy, yellow hair, and each of them led little dogs by chains. Branthorpe swaggered up street ahead of them. The other three men were very nice-looking fellows; and so was Branthorpe, but he had more of a flashy look about him. On the way to the hotel he stopped to speak to Squire Miller, who did not see Branthorpe's hand when he held it out.

"Back here for your health?" the Squire asked.

"No. My company plays here this week."

"Hope you give as good a show as you gave last spring," said the Squire, going on down street.

Branthorpe got red, and one of the actors with

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

him snickered. It looked as if Branthorpe had been bragging about what an important man he would be here. Oscar followed the company to the hotel, then hurried down to Mrs. Lancaster's and told the Emigger that Branthorpe had arrived.

"Keep your eye on him," the Emigger said.

So Oscar came to our house and got my folks to let me go with him, and we went to the hotel and sat in the big chairs out in front and watched for Branthorpe. Before long the two frizzly haired girls came out with their little dogs and two of the actors, and said they believed they would take a walk.

"Isn't it a quaint little place?" asked one of them.

"Yes, and the local characters are so funny," said the other.

"Cut it out," said one of the men. "You'll queer the show if you talk that way."

They strolled up street, and then Branthorpe and the other man came out. The other man lit a cigar and sat down, but Branthorpe stood and fidgeted around a little while. Pretty soon he saw Oscar and me.

"Why, hello!" he said. "Isn't this the Thompson boy?"

"Yes, sir."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I thought I remembered you. How's everything?"

"Everything is all right."

"Not much change since I was here last," Branthorpe said.

"I suppose not."

"Say, come over this way a minute," he said to me. "I want to get you to do something for me."

He led the way up street a little piece, then asked me, in a low tone.

"Isn't Annie Davis home again?"

"Yes, she is," I told him, wondering why he should ask me.

"How long has she been home?"

"A little while."

"You know her pretty well, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Will you do me a favor if there is a quarter in it for you?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Just take this note down to her house and hand it to her. Be sure that nobody else gets it, and come right back to me."

"I couldn't do it, Mr. Branthorpe," I said, trying to think of an excuse that would sound reasonable.

"Can't do it?" he said, holding the note in one hand and some money in the other.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"No, I haven't got time."

"Rats! You've got lots of time. It won't take you but a minute."

"I can't just the same," I said, edging away. "I don't want to get into trouble."

"Thunder! You won't get into any trouble."

"I might," I answered, turning to go back where Oscar was.

"All right. You needn't take it then, you little fool."

Then Branthorpe started up street alone. Oscar got up from his chair in a minute, crossed the street, and went up the other side. I was going along with him and telling him what Branthorpe wanted me to do, when he said:

"You duck away, Johnny. If he sees us together he will know we are shadowing him. You wait at the bridge for me."

So I went to the bridge and waited, chucking stones into the creek and fooling around for a long time until Oscar came back.

"He's at the hotel again," Oscar told me.

"Where did he walk to?"

"All over town pretty near, but finally he loafed around through the side streets and sauntered along in front of Davis's house, looking into the windows, and going so slow he hardly seemed to move."

"Was Annie in sight?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“No.”

We went back to Lancaster's and told the Emigger about it, and he said Oscar had better keep his eyes on Branthorpe for a while that evening.

Annie and her folks came to church that night, and the Emigger sat with them. I walked out behind them, and as we were going down the steps Oscar squeezed through the crowd and tugged at the Emigger's sleeve. The Emigger stopped and Oscar and he stood at one side of the steps, and Oscar began whispering something. I walked on down the steps and to the street behind Mr. and Mrs. Davis and Annie. Just as they were turning to go towards home, Branthorpe stepped up to them and held out his hand and bowed to Annie.

“Why, Miss Davis,” he said, “it surely is a pleasure to meet you again.”

Annie looked at him and then got white, and took hold of her father's arm and hurried on without a word. Branthorpe swore under his breath and followed along behind them. I kept about half a block from him, and before long Oscar caught up with me. We ducked along in the shadow of the trees and watched Branthorpe. We thought he would follow the Davises home, but instead he went straight to

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

the hotel. Oscar and I waited until the Emigger came down-town, and Oscar reported to him. He said that would be all that Oscar needed to do that evening, but if he had the time Monday he might keep on the trail, but not to let it keep him from school.

After school the next afternoon, when I got to the office, the Emigger and Mr. Bashford were talking about Branthorpe. It appeared that he had paraded up and down in the neighborhood of Davis's house all day nearly, and that his actions were causing a whole lot of comment. The Emigger was mad as a hornet over it, but said he didn't see what he could do to stop Branthorpe. He had seen Annie, and she had been frightened half to death by Branthorpe's actions. She was afraid of the man, and didn't dare to come out of the house, the Emigger said.

"Branthorpe is in front of the hotel bragging about himself," Oscar said, coming into the office. "He is talking with several of the men that usually loaf down around there, and I heard him mention Annie Davis's name several times."

The Emigger began chewing his mustache, and then without saying a word he got up, slammed his hat on his head, and started out. Oscar followed him.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Unless I am greatly mistaken, Johnny,” Mr. Bashford said, “we may have to print a column or so casualties this week. My respected partner is getting into a Virginia mood.”

Oscar told me that night about what happened when the Emigger joined the crowd in front of the hotel. He said that the Emigger pulled up a chair and sat down and didn't seem to be paying much attention to what Branthorpe was saying—just lighted a cigar and sat there as if he had nothing else to do. But pretty soon Branthorpe looked sort of wise and laughed without saying anything, when some one said there had been considerable excitement after he was here before. The Emigger straightened up in his chair then. Branthorpe smiled some more, then said:

“Well, I'm not responsible for all the talk that has been indulged in.”

“I suppose,” Ike Peters said, “that fellows like you, travelling around the country all the time, have a lot of affairs with women?”

“Oh, a few,” Branthorpe replied, tilting his chair back against the wall.

“Get 'em so stuck on you that they follow you away, huh?” Ike snickered.

“Once in a while,” Branthorpe grinned.

Nobody said anything then, and Branthorpe sort of sneered:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Then they go back home and put up a good story to fool the old folks."

At this the Emigger leaned over towards him and said, in a soft, polite voice:

"Will you be so obliging, sir, as to explain that remark?"

"What? I don't know that I need to make any explanations to you."

"You will change your mind mighty quick, unless you have changed it already. What did you mean by that?"

"You can take it any way you like," said Branthorpe, blustering because he thought the crowd was on his side.

"It may be difficult, sir, for you to understand that this community has a few high ideals concerning its daughters," the Emigger went on, in that soft, soothing voice of his; "but such is the case. Without mentioning any names at this moment, I wish to inquire whether the young lady you mentioned a while ago, or who was mentioned by some one else, is in the class of those you speak of as coming home with a story that will fool the old folks?"

"I don't know that you have any right, Mr. What's-your-name, to cross-question me," Branthorpe replied, still very smartly.

"My name, sir, is Asbury Dabney Colqu-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

houn, late of Red Gap, Virginia. I don't know what your name is, but I do know the one you are going under now. I don't care about that, but I shall put it plainly, and you must answer me plainly: Did you see Miss Davis at all after you left here?"

Branthorpe shrugged his shoulders and twitched in his chair, and then he happened to look square into the Emigger's eyes. Oscar said he never saw a man whose eyes could look as piercing and blazing as the Emigger's were then. Branthorpe gulped once or twice.

"Did you, or did you not?" the Emigger asked, half rising.

"No, I didn't," Branthorpe said, sulkily.

"I knew, sir, you were a liar when I first saw you."

Branthorpe jumped up from his chair at that.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

The Emigger got up and straightened out his arm and shook his finger in Branthorpe's face.

"You are a liar, sir, and a poltroon, and a coward. Any man who will slur and insult women as you do is a pup and a scoundrel. You have been trying to cast a doubt on the good name of one of our young women, and I do not propose to let it go unresented."

Branthorpe got kind of green in the face,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

then his eyes gleamed viciously, and he muttered:

“She did her best to get me to cast the doubt—”

“Stop right there!” the Emigger ordered, and Branthorpe shut up like a clam. “Now, sir, I’ve let you escape once from me. I’ll make it twice. There isn’t room in this town for you and me. One of us is going to leave here inside of an hour. Do you understand that?”

“You can’t drive me away.”

“I’m not going to drive you away. I’m going to kill you. If you are not out of this town inside of an hour I’ll shoot you like a dog.”

“Don’t you threaten me. I’ll have the law—”

“That isn’t a threat, sir; it is a promise. There isn’t any law to take care of you. It’s five o’clock now. I’ll come after you at six, and if you are not gone I will send you where you belong.”

Then the Emigger turned and left him, and Branthorpe stood there wiping his face with his handkerchief and trying to bluster out something. But the fellows that had been listening to him got up one by one and moved off up and down street, and in a few minutes

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

he had the whole front of the hotel to himself. Then he went inside.

The Emigger came back to the office, went to his desk without saying a word, pulled the bottom drawer out, reached away back in it, and took out a revolver. It wasn't like the revolvers they sell at the hardware store. They are bright and nickel-plated. This one was bigger than any one of them, and it was black. The Emigger bent the barrel down, knocked the cartridges out on his desk, and rubbed the revolver with his handkerchief, blowing through the chambers and the barrel and polishing it as carefully as if it had been a watch. Then he slipped the cartridges in it again and dropped it in his hip-pocket.

"When does the war begin?" Mr. Bashford asked. He had been sitting there watching the Emigger curiously.

"At six o'clock. Bashford, I've made forty kinds of a fool of myself, but Branthorpe brought it on himself. I told him I'd shoot him up if he didn't leave town."

"Don't worry. He'll leave."

"Well, maybe so," the Emigger said. "But," he added, "I hope he doesn't. It would be my finish here, but I'd go satisfied if I could settle him."

XVII

THE Emigger sat at his desk then, and tugged at his mustache and thought. He took some paper and a pen and ink and wrote a letter, put it in an envelope, and addressed it. Then he wrote another letter and addressed it. He put the letters in front of him and sat and looked at the top of his desk for a long time.

"Johnny," he called to me.

I came up to him, and he showed me the two envelopes.

"I'll leave these letters here," he said, "when I go out. Maybe you'll have to mail them."

One of them was addressed to Mrs. Isabel Colquhoun, Red Gap, Virginia; the other one to Annie Davis.

"You seem to take this little affair pretty seriously, Colquhoun," Mr. Bashford said.

"It may prove serious."

"I guess not. You run that fellow once, didn't you?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Yes, but this time it's different."

"Not a bit of it. He's got a yellow streak in him a yard wide."

"I know it, but a rat in a corner will fight. I wish I hadn't said what I did. Not that I care a rap what he thinks, but I wish I hadn't shown that side of my nature here. Bashford, I'm a fool."

Mr. Bashford looked at the Emigger for about a minute, then pinched a chew of fine-cut from the sack of tobacco on his desk, and said:

"I'm another. If you don't go after that fellow at six o'clock, I will."

I was through with work for that evening, anyway, so I stepped to the front-door of the office and looked down street. Ordinarily, at that time of the day, everybody is moving towards home, but nobody seemed in any hurry to get supper that night. In fact, more people were coming down-town than are usually in sight at that time. As they passed the office they would look in and see the Emigger sitting at his desk. He had his feet up on the top of it now, and was leaning back in his chair, laughing and talking with Mr. Bashford as if he had entirely forgotten what he had threatened to do.

"If I were you," Mr. Bashford said, "I don't

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

believe I would carry that artillery with me when I went after Branthorpe."

"You wouldn't?"

"No. It's like hunting quail with a cannon."

"I ought to be kicked for threatening to shoot him."

"No. That was all right. Really, he ought to be shot. But you don't need to lug that mountain howitzer with you."

"Why?"

"Leave it here in the office and go down towards the hotel at six o'clock. If you meet him, whip him with your fists. But you won't meet him."

"I'm not so sure about that. I hope I won't—but I'm afraid I won't."

The Emigger laughed, and so did Mr. Bashford. Then Mr. Bashford said:

"Now, see here. Let me take that gun and walk down street behind you. If you need the gun I'll use it. I—you see, Colquhoun, I don't want you to do it, if it has to be done. It won't make so much difference if I do it, but you've got to establish a footing here. The people won't mind it if I do a little shooting, but they may think you are too presumptuous for a new citizen, comparatively. I've been here so long they don't care what I do.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

And nobody will feel badly over any little lapse in decorum on my part."

"But somebody will, and you know it, Bashford."

"No. Now, as a favor to me, let me have the gun."

The Emigger slowly took the revolver from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Bashford, who looked it over carefully, and tried its weight in his hand, then dropped it in the side-pocket of his coat.

"The last time I used that gun," the Emigger said, "was when Pinkney Sanger waylaid me back at Red Gap. I got a tip of his left ear that time."

"That was the time you and he had the dispute because his grandfather's mule kicked your grandfather, or words to that effect?"

"Yes. A man and a gun are a fool combination."

The Emigger began studying again and drumming with his fingers on the desk. One of the Eldridge boys that live next to the Davises came in with a note for him. He gave the boy a dime, told him to run along, and looked at the address of the note. Then he laid it on the desk and said he would open it later in the evening. I could guess it was from Annie Davis.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I put on my hat and slipped out, leaving Mr. Bashford and the Emigger still talking. I ran into Oscar down on the corner and we went down to the hotel. On the way we saw people standing in the doorways of the stores and sitting in their front yards. Evidently they had all learned of the possibility of a fight between the Emigger and Branthorpe. I could understand now why he was calling himself a fool for having made the threat he did. Every little bunch of men we passed was discussing him, and going over the circumstances of his coming here, and they were guessing at his past history. Some of them, too, were saying that he was only bluffing, and others were declaring that he wasn't, that he would do what he had said he would.

Branthorpe was sitting in front of the hotel smoking a cigar, and looking as if it was his first and was making him sick. Three or four men were there, and he was trying to talk unconcerned to them. But he was doing a poor job at it. There was a horse and buggy hitched in front of the hotel. It belonged to some one from the country who had driven to town for something or other.

Ike Peters happened along and stopped in front of Branthorpe.

"Bad fellow you're up against," he said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Oh, I guess not."

"Fact. He's a bad man. I hear tell that down in Virginy, where he come from, he was a shooter from Shootersville."

"He may find out that I came from the same town," Branthorpe replied, trying to look careless and indifferent.

"Mebbe so, but I'd hate to be in your shoes. You may be from Shootersville, but he's the oldest inhabitant from there," said Ike, laughing that wheezy laugh of his.

"Well, what is it to you?" Branthorpe asked, getting mad. "What are you butting in for? Who asked you for your opinion?"

"Nobody, and nobody's getting it." Then Ike walked across the street and sat on the curb and began whistling "Just Before the Battle, Mother."

Ira Growley was sitting in one of the chairs in front of the hotel. He took out his watch and looked at it, then snapped the lid shut with a loud click.

"Time's getting short," he said.

Branthorpe licked his lips with his tongue to get them wet enough for him to speak, and then asked:

"What time is it?" His voice sounded as if his throat was dry.

"Five minutes to six—or was when I looked."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Branthorpe hitched his chair out to where he could see the *Chronicle* office by turning his head, and then he caught sight of Oscar and me.

"What are you kids doing here?" he asked us. "You've been hanging around me ever since I came to town."

"Guess they want to learn how to act," Growley said.

"Who asked you to butt in, you rube?" Branthorpe snapped at Growley.

"Say, young fellow, you're going to have one good fight on your hands in about three minutes. I don't think you want to look for any more."

Branthorpe muttered something and looked nervously up the street. Nobody said anything. The two frizzly haired actresses came and looked out of the ladies' entrance of the hotel. One of their little dogs ran out, and one of the girls rushed out and caught it and carried it in, saying:

"I won't let Toto get shot."

Branthorpe squirmed at that. The other three men of the company were in the hotel office, talking together in low tones and looking out at Branthorpe occasionally. Everything got still. The people all the way up and down Main Street stopped talking to one an-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

other. Oscar and I were standing at the hitching-post in front of the hotel. I could see the folks in front of the stores look first towards the *Chronicle* office, and then towards the hotel. It seemed like everybody was getting nervous. Oscar whispered to me:

“Do you think he will come?”

I only looked at him. Then the clock in the office of the hotel began to buzz like it always does just before it strikes. Then—

Dong! Dong! Dong! It began striking.

Branthorpe jumped up from his chair and looked up street towards the office. Everybody else was looking the same way. The clock went on striking. And then out of the door of the *Chronicle* office came the Emigger. His hat was set down over his eyes a little bit and his coat-tails flapped from side to side as he walked. He didn't look to right nor left, but came straight ahead, not seeing any one. As he came along the sidewalk the men stepped to each side of the street and gave him room. He paid no attention to them. Back of him walked Mr. Bashford, his little brown derby hat tilted over to one side. He had his hands in his coat-pockets and kept looking our way continually.

“He's coming! Here he comes!” some one shouted.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Then somebody brushed past Oscar and me, knocking us off the sidewalk. We whirled around to look, and it was Branthorpe. He had his knife in his hand. He slashed at the hitching-strap of the horse, cut it loose, jumped into the buggy, whacked the horse with the whip, and went galloping across the railroad and out into the country.

The Emigger stopped, laughed to himself, and turned around and went back to the office, with Mr. Bashford walking beside him, saying, "I told you so." The people stood in their tracks for a while, and then scattered out home talking about the affair. The man that owned the horse and buggy ran up to the hitching-post and took the cut end of the hitching-strap in his hand and looked at it, then down the street in the direction Branthorpe had gone, then up the street towards the *Chronicle* office, then he turned to me and Oscar and said:

"Well, if that ain't the beatin'est trick I ever saw!"

XVIII

I HURRIED up and got to the office about the same time as Mr. Bashford and the Emigger. Mr. Bashford was chuckling to himself, but the Emigger was thoughtful.

“That’s the first and the worst bluff I ever made,” he said. “Always when I’ve told a man I was coming for him with a gun, I could show the goods. It wasn’t right. It wasn’t fair. That fellow thought I had my weapons or he wouldn’t have run. I’m ashamed of myself.”

“Well, I’m in the same boat,” Mr. Bashford said. He opened his desk, and there lay the Emigger’s revolver.

“What! You didn’t take it along?” the Emigger asked.

“No. As soon as you started out I put it in here and closed the desk.”

The Emigger dropped in his chair and looked at the revolver and then at Mr. Bashford and then at me.

“If this don’t beat my time,” he said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Bashford, you've got sand. Now, I felt all right because I thought you were back of me with that weapon. But you — well, you've got nerve, sir; you've got pure nerve. I admire you more than ever."

"I had nerve," said Mr. Bashford, "because I knew what Branthorpe would do."

The Emigger took his revolver and put it in the top drawer of his desk.

Just then the manager of the show company came in.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I want to thank you for inducing Branthorpe to resign his position with my company. I was going to discharge him this week, anyhow."

"The pleasure is all ours," Mr. Bashford said.

"But about that horse and buggy he took. Is there likely to be any trouble for me over that?"

"Oh no. He'll probably drive to Kensington and leave it there when he takes a train. We'll hear from it." Which was just what happened.

"I'm glad Branthorpe has gone," the manager went on then. "You see, he got into my company on false pretences. He isn't an actor at all. He's a disgrace to the profession. I find that he has never been connected with a company for more than two weeks, and that

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

most of his experience has been gained from getting up amateur performances. There are some good men doing that, though, but Branthorpe is not one of them. He is a vain, conceited, unprincipled cuss, and we are better off without him."

"But how will you play to-night without him in the cast?" Mr. Bashford inquired.

"That's easy. Mr. Telfair will double his part in the plays we will put on here. I hope you'll be out to see our performance to-night."

"I'll be there," Mr. Bashford said.

"And you?" the manager asked the Emigger.

"I thank you, sir, but in view of the happenings of the last half-hour it might be that I'd be more of a show than the play would be, so I shall be compelled to forego the pleasure of—"

"Excuse me, sir, but aren't you one of the Virginia Colquhouns?"

I pretty near laughed at that. It was the first time any one had put such a question to the Emigger. Always he was asking other people if they weren't connected with the Virginia So-and-sos.

"I am, sir. I am Asbury Dabney Colquhoun, late of—"

"From good old Red Gap! Dab, don't you

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

remember me? I'm Courtland Gooch—but my name on the bills is Sidney Lee.”

“Court Gooch! Well, by the great horn spoon, I never would have known you! Set down; set down!”

Then they began talking. It seemed that Mr. Gooch was raised in the next county to the Emigger, and that they had had a lot of fun together when they were boys, and they certainly were awful glad to see each other.

“When I heard of the row Branthorpe had gotten into, it seemed to me that he must be up against some one from my end of the country,” Mr. Gooch laughed. “It reminded me of the days when you and Pinkey Sanger used to take shots at each other. How did that ever wind up?”

“Oh, that's all forgotten now. I haven't seen Pink for a long time.”

It ended in Mr. Gooch going to Mrs. Lancaster's boarding-house to eat supper with the Emigger, and people on the street were more surprised than ever to see the Emigger walking down street arm in arm with the manager of the company, when they mostly had an impression that he was unhappy if he couldn't shoot an actor every chance he got.

The opera-house was crowded that night. The affair with Branthorpe turned out to be a

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

bigger advertisement for the show than anything else could have been. The manager hunted up Hiram Flood, whose horse and buggy had been taken by Branthorpe, gave him passes for himself and wife, who was with him, and took them into the show. Before the performance was over he sent word to Hiram that his horse and buggy had been found in Kensington, and were being brought back at the expense of the show company.

Oscar and I sat together down in front and enjoyed the performance. You know "East Lynne" is a pretty sad sort of a show, but there are a few funny things in it. It is very impressive, though, where the wedding-march plays and the old servant says, "Welcome to East Lynne, Lady Isabel." Lizzie Collins played the piano for the overtures, and she came in just right at the sad parts with soft music, playing "The Maiden's Prayer" and "Flee as a Bird," and things like that. In between the first and second acts she played the piece about a thunder-storm in the Alps, and got great applause. But dramatic performances are queer. Now, for instance, the heavy-set actress, who looked old enough to be the mother of those two frizzly haired actresses, played a pretty young girl in the show.

Just before the performance began Mr. Bash-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ford came in, all dressed up in his best clothes, and looking like a regular dandy, and he had Flora Beavers with him. They had seats pretty well down in front, and if you had seen Mr. Bashford walking down the aisle ahead of Flora, holding his plug hat in his hand, and stepping along so dignified, you never would have thought he was the same man that hunched over his desk in the office and chewed fine-cut and wrote things in his shirt-sleeves. I watched him once in a while during the evening, and I don't really believe that he chewed any tobacco at all during the show. I don't see how he got along without it. Flora Beavers had on her new black net dress that I had heard her and ma talking about how it ought to be made, and she had a flower in her hair, and she looked as young and pretty as could be. I've always noticed that whenever a woman that is called an old maid gets a beau she can make you forget that she is over twenty-five years old. Pa says a man is as old as he feels, but a woman is as young as she used to be, whatever that means.

Just after the show began, something happened that made everybody in the house twist around in their seats and look back, and keep looking until the people they were watching had taken their seats. The Emigger came,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

after all, with Annie Davis. They walked down the aisle together, Annie holding his arm and looking like the pictures you see of angels. She was dressed in some kind of a white dress that sort of drifted around her like white mist, and under that there was another dress that had roses and vines on it, and it just looked as if you were looking at a beautiful lot of flowers through a haze. Annie had her hair twisted all up on top of her head, and she looked almost as tall as the Emigger, and there wasn't any collar on her dress, and it had short sleeves. I thought she was pretty before, but this time I knew I had never even guessed what pretty meant. She smiled and bowed to several people that bowed to her, and got into her seat as soon as possible. The Emigger looked like he felt mighty proud of being with her. He wore his best black prince albert suit—but he didn't have a plug hat. He carried his wide-brimmed black hat in his hand. People around Oscar and me were whispering about them so that we couldn't hear the show.

"They're a fine-looking couple," Judge Lambert said to his wife.

"He is so noble appearing," Mrs. Lambert whispered.

"Well, she's a queen, all right," the Judge laughed.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Orphena Green and Mrs. Anderson sat beside Oscar and me, and they had turned around till I thought their backbones would squeak, watching the Emigger and Annie until they sat down.

"Annie is a poem imbued with life," Orphena whispered.

"I wonder who made her dress," Mrs. Anderson replied. "I never can get mine to set that way at the waist."

Oscar rubbered back at them for a while, and then said:

"Say, Johnny, Mr. Colquhoun's got the peach of them all, hasn't he? But Mr. Bashford's girl is good-looking, too."

"They're not their girls," I said. "They're only friends."

Oscar cocked his eye at me and said: "Shucks! You never could see anything."

Then we commenced watching the show again, and got so interested in it that we didn't take our eyes off the stage any more. When the show was out people sort of hung back about the door fixing their hats and wraps, until Mr. Bashford and Flora Beavers came out, and there was a lot of whispering as they went down the stairs; then when the Emigger and Annie came along a good many people shook hands with them and asked about their

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

health. You see, it was the first time, except to go to church, that Annie had gone anywhere, and folks wanted her to feel that they were glad to see her.

Oscar and I had been blocked in the aisle, so we came out right behind Annie and the Emigger. We went down the stairs alongside of them and he asked us how we enjoyed the show.

"I enjoyed everything I saw," Oscar said, and winked at me. The Emigger saw him wink, and smiled quietly and said:

"By-the-way, Mr. Detective, come around to-morrow and we'll settle up with each other. But remember, you are still to find my horse—old Jeff."

"And when you find Jeff don't let him get away from you, Oscar," Annie laughed, as they turned at the door and started home.

Oscar was sore about what Annie said. He thought she was poking fun at him.

"Just because I couldn't get her to come home when I found her at Oakville, she thinks she's got a right to kid me," he growled. "All right, though. If it hadn't been for me she wouldn't be here to-night, most likely."

I had to agree with Oscar that he was right about it.

We went the next night to see "Sentenced

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

for Life." It was great. In the last act the fellow that played Jack was shot while he was trying to escape from Sing Sing, and he turned over after he died, and said:

"Young men, beware of my sad fate. Take warning from this cruel ending of a misspent life, and keep yourselves in the straight and narrow path."

Then he turned back and died again.

"Bet you if Colquhoun had got a shot at Branthorpe he wouldn't have had strength enough to make any farewell speeches," Ira Growley said while we were coming out.

"Ten Nights in a Bar-Room" was good, and had a good crowd. All the church people that wouldn't attend the other plays, because they were regular theatre shows, came out to it, and Lafe Skidmore said he hoped that after they had seen it none of them would go home and throw bottles at the children like the man did on the stage.

"It was the best opera we've had since the magic-lantern show was here in the lecture course," Tirzah Harper said.

I was straightening things up in the office the evening after the show had left town, and found the two letters the Emigger had written before he started out to meet Branthorpe. Also I found the still unopened note that had

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

been left for him. I laid them on his desk where he would be sure to see them, and later on, when he came in, told him about them. He tore them up—that is, the two he had written. Then he opened the one that I guess was from Annie Davis and read it. He read it over two or three times, I think, then put it in the inside pocket of his coat.

“I’m glad I didn’t have to mail those letters,” I said to him.

“So am I. One of them was to the best woman in the world.”

“She is a good girl,” I said.

“Who is? Oh! I meant my mother, Johnny. But the other one is pretty nice, as you say. Getting to the age where you commence to form some opinions about the fair sex, eh?”

XIX

THERE was what the big papers call a flutter in social circles the next Sabbath. George Horwick walked home from church with Annie Davis. Except the Emigger, nobody had called on her since she came home, but the boys had teased George a good deal about his girl having come back. They asked him, too, if he was going to let Mr. Colquhoun beat his time.

When George walked up beside Annie and strolled along with her from the church door and on down the street, the Emigger, who had been moving towards her, didn't appear to notice it at all. He stopped and spoke to three or four people, and then walked home with our folks, and talked politics with pa all the way.

"I guess Mr. Colquhoun's nose is kind of out of joint," ma said, while we were eating dinner.

"Um—well, mebbe," pa said, and helped me to some more chicken.

That night the Emigger went out to Bea-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

vers' with Mr. Bashford. It was the first Sabbath night he had done this for a long time.

George Horwick, once he started to going with Annie again, kept the sidewalk warm in front of her house. He spent three evenings there that week and took her buggy riding one afternoon. Oscar told me this. He has got in the habit of seeing everything that goes on.

I got off Saturday for all day, as pa and ma wanted me to go to Kensington and buy my winter suit. We drove down and back, and had dinner at the Elite restaurant. Kensington is the county-seat, but it is deader than Plainville, really.

We went to Morgan's clothing store to get my suit. Pa always trades there when he goes to Kensington. Mr. Morgan always waits on us himself. When we went into the store, he met us and shook hands with pa and ma, and said he was glad to see them, and asked where they had been keeping themselves. Said he was thinking about sending out a searching party for them if they had stayed away another week.

"It certainly is fine to see you," he said. "And how is that little boy of yours?"

"Doesn't he look all right?" pa asked, looking at me.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Oh, I mean that little fellow—Johnny—that you used to buy clothes for from me.”

“Why, that’s Johnny.”

“Get out! You can’t fool me. Bless my soul! You don’t mean to say that child has grown to be such a fine young man as this! Why, I thought this was your younger brother, or something like that. Who would have thought it!”

And he slapped me on the shoulder and shook hands with me, and then I knew he was only cracking a joke and that he had known it was me all the time.

“Now,” he said, “what will it be this time?”

“I don’t know as we want to buy anything, Mr. Morgan,” ma said. “We just thought we would look around and see what you might have.”

Ma always says that when we go to buy anything.

“That’s right,” Mr. Morgan said. “Make yourselves at home. Look over everything we have, and if you don’t see what you want I’ll send out and get it.”

“I might look at a suit for myself first,” pa said.

“With pleasure, Mr. Thompson.”

Mr. Morgan took a tape-line and put it around pa’s chest and looked at the figures.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Forty!" he exclaimed. "Gracious, man, you're getting big as a bull. You take a man's size for a fact."

He led us back to a table covered with men's suits, got a chair for ma, and began picking around to find the right size.

"Something in a nobby business suit?" he asked. "Say a mixed cheviot, double-breasted, or a nice three-button sack?"

"That would be about the thing," pa said; but ma spoke up:

"I think a good clay-worsted cutaway that he can wear for dress-up and Sabbath would be better."

Pa's good suit is always a clay-worsted cutaway that he can wear for dress-up or Sabbath, and every time he buys a new suit he wants to get a double-breasted or a sack suit.

"I'll try on the sack suit, Morgan, if you've got it handy," pa said, looking at ma.

Mr. Morgan pulled out a coat, and pa took off the one he was wearing and slipped the sack coat on. It looked nice, except that I missed the long tails. But it made pa look younger, really. It was a mixed plaid, Mr. Morgan said.

Pa went to the mirror and twisted himself around to see his back. "It fits tolerable well," he said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"It hunches up too much between the shoulders," ma said. "You're not the build of a man to wear a sack suit."

"I believe you're right, Mrs. Thompson," Mr. Morgan said. "You'd be surprised how many men there are who can wear a sack suit, and how few can wear a cutaway with any style to them. Now, Mr. Thompson is just naturally made for a cutaway suit."

"That's what I always tell him," ma replied. "Suppose you try one on him."

Pa kept admiring the sack suit, but when Mr. Morgan brought the cutaway coat he had to try it on. It did fit him better—that is, it looked more natural on him.

"That's the kind of a suit for you," ma told him. "It is a good clay worsted?"

"It's the real Henry Clay, Mrs. Thompson," Mr. Morgan laughed.

"Let me see it," ma said. Pa took off the coat, and ma took it to the light and looked it over, examining the seams and the way the buttons were sewed on.

"Any shoddy in it?" she asked Mr. Morgan.

"Every thread in it is right off the sheep's back, except the silk the buttons are sewed on with."

Ma turned up the lining at the coat-tails and

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

pulled a thread off the body of the coat and bit it.

"I'm not sure that it's all wool," she said.

"I'd stake my reputation on it," Mr. Morgan said.

"I didn't know a clothing man had any reputation," pa said, with a smile.

"There you go!" Mr. Morgan, said, as if he was angry. "Every time you come in here you begin attacking my reputation. I tell you, this is a hard world to get along in. Here, slip this coat on. Goes on you like the paper on the wall. There, hold up your arms. Sleeves just the right length. Now, turn around." He slid his hand across the shoulders and down the back, smoothing the coat into place. "Ever see anything fit like that, Mrs. Thompson?"

"It does fit pretty well," ma conceded.

"Now, try on the pants and vest, Mr. Thompson, and I'll have the suit altered, if it needs it, and it can be pressed and ready for you when you want to start home."

Pa was about to say all right, but ma said:

"Haven't you got something else in the same line?"

"Oh, my, yes. Dozens of 'em."

Mr. Morgan got out a lot more of the coats,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and had pa try them on one after the other. While he was doing that, ma said:

"We might as well look at something for Johnny while we are at it."

So Mr. Morgan had a clerk bring some suits around for me to try on. I wanted to keep a nice black coat—or the suit that it belonged to. It had the lapels faced with silk or satin, or something shiny. But ma said it looked too flashy. We worked and worried there for about an hour, and finally pa said:

"Well, I guess that coat Johnny has on and the suit I looked at first will be about right."

"The first cutaway suit, you mean," ma corrected.

"Er—yes," pa said.

"Well, we'd best look around a little more and see if we can't do better somewhere else. What's the price of these suits, Mr. Morgan?"

"Mr. Thompson's is eighteen dollars and Johnny's is ten."

"Oh, dear! That's entirely too much! Why, we got just as good suits last fall from you for fifteen and eight."

"I expect you did, but you know everything is in a trust now."

"Everything but us. Well, we'll look at a few other places, and if we can't do any better we may come back here."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Better let me have these wrapped up right away, Mrs. Thompson.”

“I expect we might as well take these,” pa said.

“No. We can save money—or if we can’t, at least we can see what the others have.”

“Very well,” Mr. Morgan said. “I’m glad you came in, Mrs. Thompson; and if you don’t find what you want elsewhere, come back and I’ll treat you right.”

We went out and down street to another store, and went through the same performance, but couldn’t find anything that suited ma.

Then we went to another store, and the same performance was gone through with again. We always do that. When we came out of the last place ma was for going to still another, but pa said:

“No. I’m tired, and Johnny is clean worn out. I don’t see any sense in this.”

“But the only way to know whether you are getting your money’s worth is to know what you can get everywhere.”

“That may do for a woman who is buying two spools of thread or a yard of gingham, but I’m not a shopper. When I go to buy anything, I know what I want, and I go where it is kept and I get it,” pa said, turning back towards Morgan’s.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Oh, well," ma said, "if you feel that way about it, we'll go back there, but if you get a suit that falls to pieces the first time the rain strikes it, don't blame me."

We stopped on the way at a dry-goods store, where ma bought some goods for a dress. Pa talked politics with the proprietor while she got the goods and some trimming to match. Mr. Morgan was just as glad as ever to see us.

"I've kept those two suits ready for you," he said.

"Let's see them again," ma said.

She had pa and me try on the coats again, and then Mr. Morgan got the pants and vests, and took us to the dressing-rooms and had us put on the whole suits. Mine was a brown plaid suit that I didn't like, but ma said it would have lots of wear in it. Pa's suit fitted him almost perfectly. The pants of mine would have to be shortened a little.

"Don't make them too short," pa said. "Like as not it 'll be long enough before he gets another pair."

Mr. Morgan leaned against a pile of clothes and laughed and laughed when pa said that.

"There you go!" he cried, laughing until there were tears in his eyes. "'Long enough before he gets another pair! Don't make them too short!' Oh, if you aren't the greatest fel-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

low on earth for a joke. Come here, Johnson!"

One of the clerks came up.

"Did you hear Mr. Thompson's joke? He said not to make his boy's pants too short, that it would be long enough before he got another pair."

"Good! Good!" Mr. Johnson said, and he laughed and laughed and slapped Mr. Morgan on the back, and Mr. Morgan doubled up and straightened out and gasped for breath, and said pa was always taking a fellow by surprise that way—getting off a rip-roaring joke just when everybody was least expecting it. Pa looked pretty well pleased with himself.

"Don't you see?" Mr. Morgan asked. "The pants are too long now, but we mustn't make them too short. Long enough before he—oh, ho! ho! I'll die, I know!"

And he and Mr. Johnson went off into more fits of laughter, and after a while, when they got their breath back and wiped the tears off their cheeks, Mr. Morgan took a cigar from his pocket and handed it to pa, and said:

"Smoke that to-night when you get home, and think of me. I'll be laughing yet, like as not."

"What are you men making such a racket over?" ma asked, coming towards us.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"One of your husband's jokes, Mrs. Thompson," Mr. Morgan said, his sides shaking.

"Well I'm glad somebody can laugh at them."

Then Mr. Morgan had us change suits again, and then took the new suits back to have them fixed up and pressed. All the way back to the tailoring-room we could hear him laughing and repeating the joke to Mr. Johnson, who was laughing as if he enjoyed it, too.

It is funny that Mr. Morgan didn't remember that joke. It is one that pa gets off every time he buys a suit for me.

We waited until Mr. Morgan came back to us. He was still wiping his face with his handkerchief and chuckling.

"A good laugh like that in the midst of a busy day is worth paying for, Thompson," he said, "and I'm going to throw in a pair of suspenders apiece for you and Johnny."

At the counter where the suspenders were, he told the joke all over again to another clerk, and that clerk laughed heartily, too. While we were picking out the suspenders, Mr. Morgan kept talking about people he knew in Plainville, and asking us about different things there. A stranger was beside us, buying some collars, and I noticed that he turned and looked

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

at us every now and then. When Mr. Morgan left us to go and see how the suits were coming along, the stranger came up to me and asked:

“Do you live in Plainville, my young friend?”

Pa was looking at some neckties at the other end of the counter and didn't hear the man speak to me. I answered that I lived there.

“How far is it from Kensington?”

I told him.

“Pretty good sort of a town, isn't it?”

“Yes, sir.”

I noticed one thing about the man then. The tip of his left ear was gone. I didn't think anything particular of this at the time, except that it seemed odd. He was a chunky man with red hair and a sandy complexion. He was a pleasant, nice-looking man, with the exception of that left ear.

“Anything worth seeing up there? I'm travelling around for my health mostly, and don't care where I am so long as I can see something worth while.”

I told him there was good scenery down the creek — cliffs and such things — that people often came to see, and that there was good fishing in the river.

“That sounds good. By-the-way, is there a man living there of the name of Colquhoun?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Why, yes. He lives there. Do you know him?"

"I used to. I heard he was somewhere around there, and being as I used to know him I thought I might look him up."

"He'll be awful glad to see you, I know. He is a mighty clever man. If you come to Plainville I am sure he will do his best to make you enjoy yourself.

"I'm certain he will. Well, thank you, my young friend. What might your name be?"

"Thompson—Johnny Thompson."

"That's a good name, and you look like a good boy. If I come to your town I'll get you to show me around."

"All right."

"Don't tell my friend Colquhoun I'm coming. I may not get up there after all, but if I do I want to surprise him."

"All right, sir."

He got his collars then and said good-bye to me and went out. I told pa and ma about seeing him, and about his asking about Plainville, but thought of his wanting to surprise the Emigger just in time, so I didn't say anything about that part of it. We had to wait almost an hour to get our clothes, then we got our rig and drove home.

XX

MR. BASHFORD was writing at his desk when I came in Monday afternoon from school. He was chewing fine-cut rapidly and rubbing his fingers through his hair and smiling.

"Well, Johnny," he said, "are you gathering any bunions while you tread the stony path of knowledge?"

I didn't say anything. He doesn't expect you to when he asks fool questions like that.

"Knowledge is power, Johnny," he went on. "You will find that handsomely printed on a motto in your school-room. Knowledge is power. But remember also that horse-sense is horse-power, and horse-power makes the wheels go round."

There had begun to be a great difference in the way Mr. Bashford and the Emigger acted. Mr. Bashford was lively and gay most of the time now, always humming a song under his breath, and making funny remarks every now and then about nothing in particular.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“A reformer is a man who has a parade and forgets to have his circus,” he said, a few minutes later, while he was looking at a magazine that was exposing some rich people.

The Emigger didn't say anything in reply to him. The Emigger was acting as if he wasn't feeling well. It used to be him that would crack the jokes in the office, while Mr. Bashford was the one that was quiet and only poked fun at people and things instead of joining in the fun himself. Now it was Mr. Bashford who was cheerful and jolly all the time, while the Emigger was the other way about. Mr. Bashford wrote a while longer. I was setting type back at the case, and could see that the Emigger was simply marking up the paper in front of him without writing anything. After a little while Mr. Bashford said:

“What seems to be the matter, Dabney?” He had commenced calling the Emigger by that name since the show manager did.

“Oh, not much of anything,” the Emigger replied.

“That so? I'd hate to see you when there was something wrong with you then.”

The Emigger commenced marking on the sheet of paper again, and Mr. Bashford rubbed his chin with his pencil. Then he leaned across to the Emigger and said:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Losing your nerve?"

"What about?"

"Annie."

I suppose it wasn't right for me to listen. *Etiquette for Everybody* says it is the height of ill manners to eavesdrop, but when you are working for people and they talk right in front of you, you can't help noticing what they say.

"No. I'm not losing my nerve," the Emigger answered, slowly. "Not losing my nerve," he repeated.

"Looks that way to me."

"Just how?"

"Don't talk; don't eat; don't sleep—your eyes show that part of it. Buck up, old man. Why do you quit the race?"

"Never was in it."

"Faint heart, and so forth, as the poet says."

"It isn't that way. Look here, Eli, anybody can see I'm foolish to even think of having a chance there."

"Foolish not to think so."

"No. Size the thing up right. Here I come into this town a stranger, and I'm still a stranger."

"Shucks! Best-known man in the county. Elect you to anything. What you talking about, Dabney?"

"That's all very nice to say, but I've thought it all over, and I don't see how any girl could

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

be interested in me in the way you mean, when she knows what sort of a man I am—or knows how much she don't know about me. Came here a stranger, as I say. No use telling about my family, or my history prior to my advent here, because it doesn't line up properly with my record here. Ragman first. That's a fine foundation for a social career, isn't it?"

"Lots of people have worse."

"Yes, but they aren't here. Then what do I do? Distinguish myself by my gentleness and self-possession! Grab a man and choke him because he is trying to flirt with a girl! Later on, produce my revolver and get ready to shoot the man. Not only that, I go slam-banging down street as if I had the gun on me and run him out of town, and create a sensation that will never be forgotten. Oh, it's no use! I can see how it must look to everybody else."

"If you could, you'd talk different."

"You'd stick up for me, of course; but when a girl can choose between a man who shows himself to be a brawler and a bluffer—"

"And makes his bluffs good."

"And a bluffer, and a young fellow she has known all her life, and whose family history she knows—why, it's plain as day which she will choose."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"But, confound it, Dabney, you're not giving her the chance to choose."

"She has chosen."

"How? What? You don't mean you have asked her—?"

"Oh no. Got too much sense for that. But any one can see where she stands."

Mr. Bashford grinned and said:

"There never was but one man who understood women, and he acknowledged afterwards that he had guessed wrong nine times out of ten."

"Well," the Emigger said, mournfully, "I don't lay claim to any more than as much sense as the law allows, but I know when my cake is dough. I won't take the chance of being snubbed. I've been snubbed enough already."

"If you have, you've snubbed yourself."

"No. I'm out of place here, anyway. The best thing for me to do would be to go away and begin all over somewhere else."

Mr. Bashford looked at him a minute or two, then said:

"You keep on talking that way and you'll begin life again in an asylum. Say, is this affair affecting your mind? Any of your folks ever have melancholia?"

The Emigger laughed then for the first time.

"You can't understand my view-point," he

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

said. "I think that would be the simplest way to straighten matters out."

"Not on your tintype! Not by a mile. Know what I'd do if I were in your shoes?"

"What?"

"I'd settle it in three minutes."

"I'm not going to whip anybody else, Eli, or talk shooting to them either."

"That isn't necessary. I would simply ask the girl."

"You would? When I ask a girl any questions like that I want to be pretty sure what her answer will be."

"And you can bet your last dollar she knows what her answer will be before she lets you ask her. I'm going to—"

"Going to ask for me?"

"Nope. Going to ask for myself. I've got the same sort of trouble on my mind, but your uncle Eli is going to headquarters and get his verdict. He isn't going to leave town, or fret around as if his liver had forgotten its duties under the statutes in such cases made and provided."

"You have my good wishes and congratulations. But as for me—I'd better drop out."

"Say, Dabney, if you ever do such a fool thing, blamed if I don't give you a write-up that will follow you to the end of your days!"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I got so worried over the Emigger's talk about leaving here that I pried a stick of type while I was dumping it on the galley, and the interruption made them realize that they were talking tolerably loud, and they began talking about business matters. But I made up my mind that Flora Beavers was right, and that somebody ought to talk to Annie Davis about the way she was acting. At the same time I felt like talking to the Emigger over the way he was losing his nerve. If he wanted to go with Annie Davis, he ought not to let George Horwick cut him out. I agreed with Mr. Bashford that the Emigger would be as much to blame as anybody for that.

Oscar came in to walk home with me, and I asked him while we were going up street if he had found any more clues about the Emigger's horse.

"No, but I've still got that plaster cast of the footprint of the man that stole it."

"I think I found a new clue yesterday," I told him. Then I repeated what I had heard Mrs. Gillup say about how the horse might have strayed out and found its way back to where it used to live.

"Where was that?" Oscar asked, interested at once.

"Over around Sabina somewhere," I told

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

him, and then said that old Mr. Gillup always kept a diary, and like as not the name of the man he got the horse from was in it.

“I’m going to follow that up, Johnny. I’ll see old Mrs. Gillup and get her to let me look over that diary. Maybe I can get some other information from it.”

Just then I heard Mr. Bashford calling to me from behind us. I turned around and went back to him, and he said there was some job-work he wanted hurried up, and asked me to finish it after supper if I could, and to bring the proofs out to Miss Beavers’ house for him to read right away, as he would be there that evening. He said it wouldn’t keep me up or out very late, and he would be much obliged if I would do it as a favor to him, so of course I agreed to do it.

XXI

I TOOK those proofs out to Beavers' and I saw Mr. Bashford, but I did not give him the proofs—and the strangest part of it all is that he does not know to this day that I did not give them to him. I don't know whether it is proper or not for me to tell what I am going to tell now, but when Mr. Bashford instructed me about writing accounts of things, he told me to write exactly what I saw and how it happened, and it is necessary to explain the occurrences of that night. It was nearly eight o'clock when I started out there, and I tried first to find Oscar and get him to go along. But I learned afterwards that he was at old Mrs. Gillup's hunting through that diary for the name of the man Mr. Gillup had bought the horse from. So it was no wonder I couldn't find Oscar. I looked for him everywhere I had reason to think he might be, but I did not have any idea he would be at Gillup's. It was a bright, moonlight evening, and just cool enough to be comfortable, so I did not mind

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

walking out there alone. The moon had been up about an hour and was as big as a wash-tub. On the way out I thought about how much bigger the moon looks when it is just rising or setting, and of how Professor Jones explains that this is caused by the magnifying power of the atmosphere, and how far away the moon is, and other solemn things. The crickets were cutting loose for all they were worth, and the katydids were quarrelling fiercely. Orphena Green could have written a poem about that evening. I almost could write one myself, but Mr. Bashford says poets are born, not made, and that this proves their parents are to blame for not heading them off when they begin to rhyme.

Mrs. Beavers told me to sit down on the porch and wait, that Mr. Bashford and Flora had gone for a walk but would be back soon, she thought. She sat and talked with me a while, then went into the house to see about something. She didn't come back, and after a while I tiptoed to the door and looked in, and she was sitting in a big rocking-chair fast asleep. So I went back to the porch and waited. Pretty soon a hoot-owl began hooting in a bunch of trees down the lane, and I thought I would go down there and see if I couldn't catch it. When I got there I couldn't see the owl,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

so I waited a few minutes, and then it hooted right over my head. I got a stick to knock it out of the tree with, and kept looking for it, but couldn't get sight of it. I circled around the trees, and finally, on the side away from the lane, I could make out a little bunch on one of the limbs that I knew was the owl. I hunted for a stone or something to throw, but couldn't find anything, and while I was on my knees digging around, I heard voices on the other side of the trees. I peeped through, and Mr. Bashford and Flora were coming up the lane, walking real slow. If I stepped out then I knew it would scare Miss Beavers, and maybe make Mr. Bashford think I was spying on him, so I dropped down in the grass and kept quiet. To my embarrassment, they stopped when they were opposite me, and Mr. Bashford said:

"Isn't it a beautiful evening?"

"Indeed, yes," Miss Beavers said. "It is so dreamy and magnificent."

"I've never seen a prettier moon," Mr. Bashford said.

"Nor I."

"Yet it is the same old moon we see over and over again," Mr. Bashford went on. "The same moon that has looked down in its kindly way upon the world through all the myriad years of time."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Oh, Mr. Bashford, you have such inspiring thoughts. You must have read a tremendous lot.”

“Naturally a man in my profession will have come in touch with the best in literature. But yonder moon—have you ever meditated upon it, how it has beamed upon the young men and maidens, and the old and feeble; babies have cried for it, maidens have sighed to it; poets have sung to it, and the aged have looked up to it and dreamed of the days that are no more.”

“What a beautiful description! I never would have thought all that about the moon.”

“It is the moon that Shakespeare knew, that Romeo swore by, that Heloise and Abelard”—I hunted these names up afterwards—“wept under, that wrought its magic spell over Burns and Highland Mary, that silvered the ivory of the barge on which Antony and Cleopatra drifted down the rippling Nile, that sent its lustre to make bright the gilt and gold of the palaces of kings and queens of old, and that holds in its silent heart the romances of dead years and the dreams and hopes of countless lovers of to-day.”

“How sublime! Mr. Bashford, I did not know there was so much sentiment in you.”

“There is sentiment in the heart of every

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

man, Miss Flora, but the casket of his sentiment is not to be opened by every woman. Only one possesses the key to it."

Mr. Bashford sat on the bank at the side of the lane, and Miss Beavers sat down too. Now I was in a fix. They weren't eight feet away from me, and if I made the slightest sound I would be discovered, and if that happened I knew all the explanations I might make from now till doomsday would never convince Mr. Bashford that I hadn't been trying to overhear what he said. I flattened myself in the grass and tried to be as still as possible, but it seemed to me that my breathing made noise enough for any one to hear down on the road. A spear of grass got to tickling my nose, and I moved my hand up slowly and cautiously to push it aside, because no matter how I twisted my face, it scratched me all the more. Honestly, when I moved my arm and hand it sounded to me as loud as if I had hit a bass-drum. But they didn't hear me. They were sitting with their backs to me, tolerably close together. Mr. Bashford had his hat off, and if I ever get mad at him I intend to tell him the effect moonshine has on his hair. They were both looking up at the moon.

"You have true poetry in your soul, Mr. Bashford," Flora said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"The Orphena Green brand?" he asked. And then they both giggled. I was surprised. Flora turned and looked at him, and he turned and looked at her, and although their faces were in the shadow a little, you would have been surprised, too, to see how young they looked. I had always considered Mr. Bashford a man like pa or any of the other men of that age, but really he looked as young as any of the young fellows around town.

"The very idea!" Flora said, when she stopped giggling. "That's just like you, saying some ridiculous thing right at the most inspiring moment."

"Was it an inspiring moment?" Mr. Bashford asked. I twisted my head to the left a little, because I heard something coming through the grass. I wondered what it was. If it was a snake I knew I would have to jump up and yell and run, no matter what might be the result. I was so interested watching for whatever it was that was coming towards me, that I didn't hear what Mr. Bashford and Flora were saying for several minutes, although it was like a year or two to me. I could only notice a low hum of their voices, because this thing kept rustling along, stopping, then rustling again. Then it hopped into sight. It was a toad. It kept straight at me, and I held my

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

breath. It came on, and when it got in front of my eyes it stopped and looked at me. If you want to know what worry is, lie down on the ground some evening, and realize that you just have to keep still as death, and let a toad hop up in front of you and look you over. It was awful. The toad blinked once or twice, and stared at me some more. Then it deliberately hopped up in the air and lit on my head. I felt my backbone tie into knots and my flesh creep and my skin get pimply all over me. If that toad hadn't hopped off again and gone on away, I believe I would have yelled bloody murder. As it was, I was wringing wet with sweat, and it was five or six minutes before I began to notice what Mr. Bashford and Flora were saying. I looked over at them then, and they were close together, and he was saying:

"It is a beautiful poem. It goes:

"I want no sun in heaven to guide me,
I need no moon or stars to shine
While I have you, sweetheart, beside me,
While I know that you are mine.'"

"How lovely!" she said. "Did you write it?"

"Oh no. I heard some one sing it, and remembered it."

"Who sang it?" she asked, drawing away from him a little bit.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Man in a minstrel show.”

She leaned back. He held her hand up in the moonlight and looked at it and sighed. I could hear him sigh clear over where I was.

“Flora,” he said, and his voice was shaking as if he was scared—“Flora, I think I ought to be married.”

“To whoo! To whoo!” the owl broke out at that instant.

They looked up, startled, but realized what it was, and Mr. Bashford said, tenderly:

“Flora, will you?”

Then Flora Beavers let her head drop over on his shoulder, and Mr. Bashford’s arm went around her waist, and she looked up into his face, and I heard her whisper:

“Yes, Eli.”

Then he kissed her! And she let him. I was ashamed for him, and I crawled away through the grass. I didn’t care how much noise I made. When I was a little distance away from them, I heard Flora ask:

“What is that noise?”

“My friend, the owl,” I heard Mr. Bashford say. I crawled on till I struck some bushes alongside the fence by the road, and then I got up and walked back to town. When I started down the hill into town I heard the owl going:

“Who! Who! Who!”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

It sounded as if the owl was making fun of me.

Tuesday Mr. Bashford was chirpier than ever, and the Emigger was glummer yet. I thought a man that had acted as silly as Mr. Bashford had should have kept quiet and tried to be dignified again, but he would stop with a chew of fine-cut half-way to his mouth and begin whistling something or humming a song. And he kept his coat on to work in. I think he had hair-oil on his hair, too, for it looked slick and smelled like perfumery.

The Emigger looked so blue that I felt sorry for him and out of patience with Annie Davis. I said to myself I would bet the Emigger wouldn't talk so foolish to Annie if he and she had been under those trees in place of Mr. Bashford and Miss Beavers. And I concluded that the first chance I had I would drop a hint to Annie that would show her what a mistake she was making.

XXII

“IF you don’t chirk up a little,” Mr. Bashford told the Emigger one afternoon that week, “I don’t know what will become of you.”

“I’m all right,” the Emigger said, trying to smile.

“All right? You keep on walking around so gloomy and I’ll have Ol Bent come in and give me newspaper rates on you, and bury you.”

The Emigger laughed some at this, and Mr. Bashford went on:

“Did I ever tell you about Ol’s experience with Mrs. Joe French? No? Well, you know who she is—Mat French, they all call her.”

“She’s a widow, I thought.”

“She is now, but she wasn’t when this began to happen. You know Ol Bent pretty well, don’t you?”

“The undertaker? Of course I know him.”

“You ought to. He’s had hopes of a boom in business ever since you struck town, and

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

folks began talking about your handiness with a gun."

The Emigger got solemn then. Mr. Bashford's remark made him think of how he had been feeling all along since he ran Branthorpe away. He said:

"Yes, I suppose people have been criticising me for that."

"Now I was only joking, Dabney. You're getting to be a regular pessimist. You know what a pessimist is, don't you? He's a man who tried to be unpopular with himself."

"What about Bent and Mrs. French?"

"Oh yes. Well, you know when Ol went into the undertaking business he had just left a position as passenger brakeman on the railroad. His uncle died and left him the hearse and the rest of the outfit, and he thought this was a fine thing for him. Naturally, having been a railroad man, he was fond of uniform, so he got a set of fire-department buttons from a firm in Cincinnati, and put them on his coat and vest."

"I've noticed those silver buttons with 'F. D.' on them that he wears, and wondered what they meant."

"They really mean 'Fire Department,' but according to Ol they stand for 'Funeral Director.' You know, here, an undertaker is a

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

funeral director, and a barber a tonsorial artist, and a carriage store is a vehicle repository—”

“Yes, I’ve seen the signs.”

“Well, to get back to the story. When Joe French was alive he got a pension of forty dollars a month, having been wounded several times in the late unpleasantness, when a lot of our people marched over there into your country and stirred things up. Mat French was, and still is, a woman with her whims. She had a fad in those times, and it was to attend funerals. Nobody died in Plainville, or for ten miles around, without her going to the funeral. In the warm weather she would always carry a bouquet of pinies or other flowers. It got to be a standing joke, the way she took in all the funerals—white, black, or mixed colors. And Ol, having been a railroader and necessarily given considerably to saying smart things, wasn’t slow to catch onto this trait of Mat French’s. He always had some little joke to crack about it, but usually in such an innocent way that nobody thought it worth repeating. One time, however, there was a colored funeral over in Egypt—you know that end of town where the darkies live used to be called that—and Ol had charge of the funeral. It was set for two o’clock, and everything was

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ready at that hour, preacher there, friends, and all, but Ol didn't give the signal to start the services. Minutes dragged along, and still Ol stood on the front steps and failed to let them go ahead. Finally, half an hour after the time set, he came into the house and told the preacher to begin. 'I've had to hold the services back a little while,' he said, 'so that Mat French could arrive. It wouldn't do to have a funeral without her, you know.' Which naturally was considered a rare piece of wit on Ol's part. And of course it was passed around from one person to another, Ol helping it gather speed, to tell the truth. Well, it wasn't a week until Mat French heard it. She never let on that she cared, never said a word, just kept on attending funerals as fast as they happened—but she arrived on time after that."

"But I don't see—"

"Wait. Joe French, Mat's husband, as I say, was getting his pension, and he had considerable of his back pension salted away in the bank. Now, in those days, when an old soldier died, the Grand Army would pay so much for his funeral expenses, and there was a state fund also from which thirty-five dollars could be taken for the same purpose. You see, when there was an old-soldier funeral, the cash available was worth while, especially to

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

a struggling young undertaker in a town like this. By-and-by Joe French gave in to the weakness of his constitution and laid him down and died. Mat didn't say a word to Ol, who had been dusting off his highest-priced casket and figuring on a lot of extras in the bargain, and who waited around his shop all day after he heard that Joe was dead. Mat sent to Kensington for an undertaker, and buried Joe in style. This was more than Ol could stand. He always was a stickler for home trade, you see, and so he deliberately went and asked Mat French why she hadn't given him the job."

"'Oh,' she said, 'I didn't want to have you worrying over whether I would be at the funeral in time or not.'"

The Emigger didn't crack a smile at this. He just relighted his cigar and commenced tapping with his fingers on his desk. Mr. Bashford looked at him with an odd expression.

"Well, by jinks!" he said. "I thought surely that story would make you forget your troubles. I tried to pick out a story that would sort of fit in with your mood."

"Eh—ah—er—tolerable fair story, Eli," the Emigger remarked.

"Say, what you need is change of air and different scenery."

"I've been thinking of that."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Then suppose you pack your little keester, and take a run around the county and get a few advertisements the last of the week."

"I wasn't thinking of that kind of a trip, Eli."

"It's the only kind I'm going to let you think of."

"But I'm— Well, to tell the truth, I'm growing restless."

"Restless? You're as restless as the pyramids. I suppose when you're really fidgety you yawn, do you? Restless! You sit around all day, and don't do anything or say anything— Why, hang it all, it would be a comfort if you would quarrel a little!"

"Done altogether too much quarrelling in my time."

"Great guns! You're always bragging about your past. Quit it, Dabney. When a man begins butting into his past all the time he mislays his future."

"But there are some things that I can't help thinking about and speaking about."

"Tell 'em to some one else, then. I'm not one of these folks that only goes to revivals to hear their neighbors confess."

"Eli, you're a good friend, and as square a man as I ever knew, but you don't seem able to understand how I feel."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Oh yes, I do. In my long and varied career I suppose my heart has been busted all to smash something like a thousand times. Why, I can remember the first time my heart was broken, and I could feel the pieces of it shifting around inside of me, and was afraid to cough for fear I'd bring part of it up. That was a girl I went to school with—I thought she had hair of pure gold and that her eyes were segments of the sky. Later on she threw me over for a boy who had more candy-money than I had, and then I discovered that her hair was plain, old, every-day red and that she had freckles as big as a corporation seal. It's been that way all along. Fall into love's young dream, wake up, and recover by degrees. It isn't so fierce when you get used to it.”

“But you never were in a position where you realized your own failings so much as I do.”

“Wasn't I? Why, I've been in love with everything from a milkmaid up to a jewel-decked heiress in my time, and I've noticed that my heart fluttered the same number of flutters in each case.”

“And did they all throw you over?”

“Not one of them, except the red-headed one I mentioned a minute ago. I didn't give the others the chance.”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

The Emigger smoked on for a while without saying a word, then he began to smile. He blew smoke rings over his head, and smiled and smiled until Mr. Bashford asked:

“What’s up? Why those merry dimples in your cheek of honest tan?”

“I was just wondering how you would be talking a week or so from now, after you have gotten that verdict you were speaking about Monday?”

“What verdict?”

“You remember telling me you were going to ask a certain question.”

I felt like speaking up right then and telling the Emigger that Mr. Bashford had already got his verdict, but thought better of it. If I should say anything it would give me away. So I kept quiet. Mr. Bashford leaned over and tapped the Emigger on the chest a couple of times, then said:

“My earnest young friend, when your uncle Eli says he is going to do something, go thou and do likewise. It is always safe to bet that Colonel Eli James Bashford, late of Cincinnati, Ohio, knows what he is doing.”

“Then you have—?”

“I can’t tell you. I won’t tell you. But I’ll say this, there isn’t a surer way to learn whether you are Number One or simply among

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

those present than to make the necessary inquiries. That is my plan."

"Sometimes, though, one doesn't need to ask any questions."

"Well, Dabney, I tell you what I'll do. Just as soon as I get all my little affairs fixed up and running smooth, if you want me to I'll take over the management of yours."

The Emigger laughed, but said he would have to find the affair first, and that he believed he would take that little trip Mr. Bashford had suggested.

"It will get my mind off my troubles," he said.

"It will do you good," Mr. Bashford said; "but as for getting your mind off your troubles, I can't say. My experience is that it's best to keep your mind on your troubles till you have decided to tell them to some one."

"All right; I'll think it over. But I've made up my mind to forget one certain trouble."

"You mean Annie Davis?"

"Yes. I've given up. Why should I not? The best thing for me to do will be to dismiss all that from my mind, and maybe after a while seek other fields."

"But, Dabney, would you go away from here and have people say your nerve failed you at the pinch?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"No. If it's to be my funeral they'll find me on hand at the proper hour, with a bunch of pinies in my hand."

"That's the stuff. Besides, I've got a particular reason for wanting you to stay in town, and I can't tell you what it is at this juncture. Come along and I'll buy the cigars."

They put on their hats and were starting out when Oscar came in.

"Mr. Colquhoun," he said, "I believe I've struck a new trail of that horse of yours."

"Bring forth the plaster footprints and the tell-tale straws, Oscar," Mr. Bashford said.

"Haven't got that kind of a clew this time, Mr. Bashford. But I've struck a new lead, Mr. Colquhoun."

"Well, Oscar," the Emigger said, "I wouldn't wear myself out if I were you. Haven't you got some other mystery you can unravel? You see, that horse has passed into history to a certain extent, and I'm not so much interested in it as I was."

Oscar's face fell at this, and the Emigger noticed it and said:

"But I don't want to discourage you. It's good training for you, anyhow, and if you like you may keep on the trail as long as you wish. But at this time I cannot promise you any

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

other reward than the consciousness of a duty well done."

"In other words, all for love and the world well lost!" Mr. Bashford said, as he and the Emigger went out. As they stepped from the door the Emigger took off his hat and made a low bow. Annie Davis was going up street.

Oscar stayed and talked with me about how he had gone through old Mr. Gillup's diary, and got barely enough information to show him the neighborhood in which the lost horse was bought. He was very enthusiastic, and wanted me to go with him in search of it, but I told him detecting was not my forte and I guessed I wouldn't have time to go along.

XXIII

NOW, I have read somewhere that when two or three people think one thing about another person that other person is almost sure to be thinking of the same thing. Professor Jones says this is a psychological manifestation, but after he says that he runs into a whole lot of long words about subliminal things and secondary impressions, and the puzzle gets so mixed up you can't understand it.

When I got home that evening, Annie Davis was at our house. She was talking to ma about something the missionary society was going to do, and as soon as I came in ma said:

“My goodness! You'll have to excuse me, Annie, while I get supper started. Pa will be home next, and if the table isn't set he gets cross as a bear.”

Annie said to go right ahead, and that she must be going home anyhow. I went to the door with her, from politeness, and after she got out on the porch she stood and looked up

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and down the street for a minute, then asked me:

“How is Mr.— How is everything at the office, Johnny?”

“Everything is all right,” I said.

“Mr. Bashford is as jolly as ever?”

“Oh yes. He’s jollier than ever.”

She smiled, and then looked serious, and went on:

“And—and Mr. Colquhoun? I suppose he is very busy now?”

Then I knew that the subliminal conscience, or whatever it is, had been at work. Psychology was manifesting itself. It had been in my mind to speak to Annie about the Emigger; no doubt he had been trying to make up his mind to go and see her again; Mr. Bashford had been saying that he ought to do it—and, of course, the secondary impressions had impressed her, and she was wanting to talk to me about the Emigger as bad as I wanted to talk to her. I stepped out on the porch, too, and told her the Emigger was not looking as well as he used to.

“No? Hasn’t he been well?”

“I don’t know,” I told her. “I think there is something on his mind.”

“On his mind? What in the world could it be?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I don't know, exactly, but I think he is planning to go away."

I wished then that the Emigger could have been there to see her face when I said that. She looked as dumfounded as you can imagine.

"Going away?" she asked. "To stay?"

"I guess so."

"But what is the matter? Isn't he satisfied here?"

"He always has seemed to be until of late."

"Maybe," she said, trying to smile unconcernedly—"maybe he has a sweetheart back there in Virginia, and wants to go back and see her."

"Oh no. I am sure he hasn't. He isn't talking about going back there at all."

She looked relieved at this, and then said:

"Oh, well, I just thought I would ask what had become of him. I haven't seen him for goodness only knows how long."

I felt like asking her why she didn't ask him about that, but didn't. I said:

"He has been working pretty hard at the office lately. But I know he has wanted to see you."

"Do you?"

"Yes, but of course he couldn't."

"Why, I'm sure he could if he wanted to."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Yes, he could see you—with George Horwick."

I think that made her a little bit mad, for she bit her lip and looked rather cross at me.

"Johnny Thompson, your folks taught you better manners, I know."

"Better manners than what?" I asked, for I had my spunk up now and didn't care what she thought about my manners.

"Than to say such an impudent thing."

"I didn't mean to be impudent. But everybody in town knows that you and George are going together again, and that he is with you as often as he can be—so what chance does Mr. Colquhoun or anybody else have?"

She got over her angry spell then and laughed at me.

"Why, you talk as if you were jealous of George Horwick, Johnny."

"I would be if I was a few years older, I expect."

"Oh, dear! If you talk that way now, what will you be when you are a man?"

"I don't know, but I won't let anybody cut me out if I want to go with a girl."

"I believe you. And you say Mr. Colquhoun is going away?"

"I said I thought maybe he was going away."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I shouldn't tell it, I guess, but I have heard him say as much."

"No. It would be wrong, of course, Johnny, for you to tell anything like that."

"Then I think I'd better not tell the rest."

"What is the rest?" she asked, stopping on the top step and turning towards me. She had been slowly edging towards the steps for a few minutes. Now she leaned against the post and waited for me to tell her.

"The rest of what?"

"Of what—of what Mr. Colquhoun says. I won't tell, Johnny."

"Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, just—just because."

"Why, he didn't say anything else much. Only that he felt ashamed of the way he had acted here, and that he thought people must have a poor opinion of him for the show he had made of himself, and that he—"

"The very idea!"

"That's what I think."

"Go on, Johnny. What else?"

"Well, I don't know that I can remember exactly what else he has said, except that it is all along that same line, but I do know what other people have said."

"Other people?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Yes. I’ve heard other people talk about him—and you.”

“What other people?”

“It isn’t right to give their names.”

“But what do they say? I don’t think they have a right to discuss my affairs that way.”

“I didn’t say how they discussed them. Besides, they didn’t say much.”

“What did they say?”

“Oh, I just heard one or two people say that they didn’t think you were treating Mr. Colquhoun right, going with George again, and giving Mr. Colquhoun the cold shoulder.”

“Did they say that about the cold shoulder.”

Her eyes were snapping again, and I corrected my remark.

“No. I put that in. That’s the way it looks to me. They just said they didn’t think you were treating him right.”

“Well,” she said, looking down at the toe of her shoe, then up at me, and with a dimple in her cheek, “Johnny, when you get to be a few years older, and folks say some girl isn’t treating you right, you be sure it isn’t for the reason that you aren’t giving her a chance to treat you right.”

I was going to go ahead and tell her all I had heard the Emigger say to Mr. Bashford, because I could see that it wasn’t her fault the

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

way things were turning out, when she turned and started down the steps, and then stopped and said:

“Johnny, you’re a friend of mine, aren’t you? You always have been.”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Well, please, please don’t ever, ever breathe a word that I have said to you, or ever let anybody—not even a certain person—know that we have had this talk.”

I promised, and just then some one stopped at our gate. I thought it was pa, but when I looked it was George Horwick.

“How do you do,” he called to Annie. “I’m going your way. Are you going home?”

“You see, I can’t help it,” she said to me, and started off.

“Oh, Miss Davis,” I called to her, as she left the steps. She stopped and turned around, and I walked down slowly to her, watching George Horwick quietly. An idea struck me. I suppose Oscar Ferguson would have called it an inspiration. I would try to make George Horwick go away without her. Annie stood, looking first at me, then towards the gate, where George was waiting patiently.

“If you weren’t in such a hurry,” I said, sort of confidentially, “maybe there is something else I could tell you that you would like to know.”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"What is it?" she asked, still edging towards the gate.

"It isn't exactly proper for me to tell it," I said, "but you remember the day Mr. Colquhoun had that trouble with Branthorpe?"

"Just the other day, when he made him leave?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Well, I remember it. What were you going to tell me?"

George was still standing at the gate, fidgeting around, and whistling a tune to himself. I could see that he was getting impatient, and that he wondered why Annie should stand there and talk so long with me after he had asked her if he could walk home with her.

"Mr. Colquhoun wrote a letter to somebody that day, to be mailed after he had the fight with Branthorpe, if he should have had the fight."

"I don't understand you," Annie said.

"I mean he left two letters on his desk, one to be mailed to his mother, and the other to somebody else, in case he—that is, if he happened to—"

"I understand. Go on." She was terribly interested now, and seemed to have forgotten that George was still waiting for her.

"George is at the gate. Hadn't you better

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

be going?" I asked her, as if that was the most important thing in the world.

"Oh, bother George! What else about the letters? One was for his mother, and the other—who was it for?"

"A young woman."

"Did you see the address?"

"Yes. He—"

"Now, Johnny, it would be fearfully wrong for you to tell any of Mr. Colquhoun's secrets, but—but I wonder—"

She turned and looked towards the gate, and did not appear to see George there, although he was leaning against the fence and looking towards us curiously. I was enjoying the performance. You see, I was beginning to have some experience with women. Mr. Bashford says the way to get a woman interested in you is to arouse her curiosity, and I was following this plan. But at the same time I was afraid ma would come to look if pa was home yet or not, and that she would think it strange for me to be talking there with Annie, when she thought Annie had gone home several minutes before. Just the same, I was determined to wear George Horwick out.

"You wonder what?" I asked.

"I wonder if you could give me a hint who the letter was addressed to."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I could, but I'll have to make a bargain," I told her. I was getting bold now.

"A bargain?"

"Yes. You tell George to go on, and I'll walk home with you and tell you on the way."

"I forgot something, Mr. Horwick," she called to him. "I'll not keep you waiting, thank you. I'm not going home this minute."

"Oh, I can wait until you are ready," George said.

"No, no. I wouldn't think of troubling you, this time. Thank you. I must go in and see Mrs. Thompson again."

Well, I thought to myself that it wasn't any wonder Annie Davis had sent the Emigger into a steady attack of the blues. I always thought I was pretty good at making up excuses on the spur of the moment, but the way Annie Davis got rid of George Horwick, and at the same time sent him away in a fairly good-humor towards her, was a revelation to me. Squire Miller says women begin making fools of men from the time they are babies, and I believe it now. George said he was sorry and went on down street, and Annie went into our house. I followed her in.

"Why," ma said, "I thought you had gone long ago, Annie, or I would have been out on the porch with you a little bit."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I should have gone, but Johnny began sparking me, and I had to stay," Annie laughed. I felt bored.

"Now, take off your things and stay for supper," ma urged her.

"I can't. I really can't. But I wish you would do one thing for me, Mrs. Thompson. Give me your lemon-pie receipt. I've been trying to remember to ask you for it for I don't know how long."

"All right," ma said, and told her how to make the lemon-pie, then said, "Now, Johnny, it's getting late, so you run along with Annie and take her home, then hurry back for supper."

"Oh, Mrs. Thompson," Annie replied, "I wouldn't impose on Johnny so. I can very well go by myself."

"Indeed you sha'n't. Johnny will be glad to go."

So I took her home. On the way she didn't say much of anything, and I began to think that she had forgotten what she wanted me to tell her, but I was mistaken. Mr. Bashford says no woman ever forgets anything she wants to find out. When we went by the office we saw the Emigger inside, sitting at his desk, writing. I noticed that Annie looked at him all the time we were going past, but he did not raise his head.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Who was the letter for, Johnny?" she asked me, as we turned the corner towards her home.

"Why do you want to know?" I asked. "It wasn't such an important letter, I'm sure, because he didn't mail it."

"He didn't?" You ought to have heard how relieved her voice sounded.

"No. He tore it up the next day."

"Was it—was it to—?"

"If he didn't mail it, it doesn't make much difference who it was for," I interrupted, because I wanted to tease her a little.

"Johnny Thompson, if you don't tell me who that letter was for, I'll never keep another promise to you."

"Will you make me another promise?"

"No. Tell me."

"It wouldn't be right for me to tell you the name that was on the envelope, but I'll say this much: it wasn't for anybody else but you."

"Then why didn't he mail it?"

"You'll have to ask him."

We were at her gate now, and she stopped and turned to go in, then said:

"I know you think I am silly, don't you, Johnny?"

"No. I think you are pretty wise." I did, too.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"But I am. And remember, you promised me not to tell about our talk."

"I won't breathe a word of it, Annie."

"Of course, if there should happen to be some way in which you could just hint in any off-hand way to some one—"

"To Mr. Colquhoun?"

"Don't talk so loud! Oh, mercy, no! I didn't mean him at all!"

Then she thanked me for coming home with her and went into the house, and I walked back home trying to figure it out. Truly, as Mr. Bashford says, by the time a man understands women, he will be too old for them to care whether he understands them or not.

XXIV

FRIDAY evening Mr. Bashford and the Emigger were talking over the trip the Emigger was to make on Saturday. This is a trip that Mr. Bashford usually makes himself. He goes to Kensington and three or four other big towns and solicits advertising, and enjoys himself, too. Wherever Mr. Bashford goes he strikes a crowd of friends. He says that one reason he is poor is he has too many friends, that if he had enemies he would have worked harder just to show them that they didn't have him sized up right. So when he makes these trips he gets four or five ads, maybe, and always comes home kicking about it, saying if they hadn't kept him sitting around telling stories he could have seen more firms and got more business.

"You'll do better than I can," he told the Emigger. "Just you flap your long-tailed coat into a store and demand to see the proprietor, and you'll scare an ad out of him in ten minutes. But, say, whatever you do, don't

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

ask him if he is of a family of the same name in Virginia.”

“I won’t, Eli,” the Emigger laughed.

“And, say, Dabney, you leave your gun at home,” Mr. Bashford said, with a worried air that he was just putting on.

“I will. My weapon is in the top drawer of my desk, if anybody comes in to whip you while I’m gone.”

“All right. I may have to use it on Mel Simpson, if I put in the item I heard about him to-day.”

“Who is Mel Simpson?”

“He’s old Mel Simpson, and he lives up the creek, and he makes a living, he claims, trapping muskrats and selling the hides. I think, though, that in the winter time he adds to his income by the hot-board method of securing chickens for the market.”

“The hot-board method?”

“Yes. Takes a board about four feet long, leans it in front of the fire for a couple hours till it is hot clear through, then tiptoes to some chicken coop with it, slides the hot board along the roost, and the chickens just step over onto the hot board and say ‘Thank you’ to Mel. Then he slips them into a wheat-sack he has provided for such an eventuation.”

“Pretty good scheme. Was that the item?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"No. Blest if I didn't come near forgetting that. You see, Mel is one of the leading anti-race-suicide men in these parts. The census-taker always gets in a day's work by the time he has tabulated the Simpson family. And, besides, naturally, being poor as Job's turkey, Mel has about the largest and most varied assortment of dogs owned in this section of the country. Now, I understand that the first of the week Mel went somewhere to put in a couple or three days' work. Naturally, when he came home, he was not feeling in a good-humor, work being a very trying experience for him. And to add to his annoyance he learned that during his absence a new member of the family had arrived."

"New baby?"

"Just so. Boy. Picture of his papa, I suppose. And Mel is boiling mad about it."

"About the baby?"

"Indirectly. Mrs. Simpson, for the first time in her life, got the lead on him in the way of naming the infant, and she sent for a preacher and had it baptized and christened 'Leo.' Mel is downright fierce about it."

"Doesn't he like the name?"

"Yes, he likes the name. That's just the trouble. He says he was saving that name for a dog he was going to get this fall, and

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

now his wife has stolen it for the youngster."

The Emigger chuckled over it, and Mr. Bashford said:

"Make a good item, won't it?"

"Yes," the Emigger said. "It would make an item worth ten dollars."

"I'll use it, then."

"All right, and here's my half of the ten dollars," said the Emigger, taking a bill from his pocket.

"Why, are you going to pay me for it?"

"No, Eli. You put five with mine, and we'll send the ten to Mrs. Simpson. I expect she'll have a use for it. And it will show our appreciation for her kindness in furnishing us with a funny item."

Mr. Bashford reached into his pocket, took out five dollars in silver, and laid them on top of the Emigger's bill.

"You bet it's worth it, Dabney," he said. "And I'll not print the item right now, either. And Mr. John Thompson, Esquire, our faithful and devoted assistant, is hereby constituted a committee of one to see that this donation is delivered to the mother of Leo Simpson tomorrow morning."

"I thought you'd see it my way in a minute, Eli," the Emigger said. "I knew you

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

would agree with me that it's fair to poke all the fun on earth at a man, but that a woman, no matter how young or old, or pretty or ugly—and few of them are ugly—is not made for the purpose of evoking our laughter.”

Mr. Bashford really looked a little bit ashamed of himself, but he took some fine-cut and began smiling again.

“Say, Eli, you're going a swift gait with that tobacco,” the Emigger said to him. “You seem to chew four times as much as formerly.”

“Yes. I'm laying in a supply for some time ahead. I'm going to stop chewing, you know.”

“Going to stop?”

“Yes. One of these times—just thinking about quitting, that is,” Mr. Bashford replied, as if he was embarrassed.

“I want to see them pinning a medal on you the day you quit,” the Emigger observed.

“You be around and you'll see my reformation.”

Then they talked some more about what the Emigger was to do while he was away, and while they were talking a stranger passed the office. He had a familiar look to me, and a second look showed me that he was the man who had asked me so many questions in Morgan's clothing store at Kensington that afternoon when pa and ma got our suits. The

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Emigger rose up in his chair and said something under his breath, then sat down again.

"What's the matter?" Mr. Bashford asked.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say that man who just passed was Pinkey Sanger."

"Your old friend and boyhood feudist? Hardly."

"I guess it wasn't Pink. But there surely was a strong resemblance."

I should have told the Emigger right then that this man had asked about him that day in Kensington, and that the man had said he wanted to surprise him. I should have told him about the man's left ear having the tip missing. I should have told him all this, but I forgot it at the moment. I supposed that the Emigger surely knew Pinkney Sanger when he saw him, and that, as he said, it was just a chance resemblance. Oscar Ferguson would have deducted something about that man at once, but, as I have said, I am too slow with theories.

The Emigger got up before long, took his grip, and went to the train, for he had to go to Kensington that evening so as to get a good, early start next day and be home Saturday night. His train hadn't been gone five minutes when the stranger passed the office again. This time the stranger peered in as if he were looking for some one.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"There goes that fellow again," Mr. Bashford said. "Looked as if he wanted to come in and subscribe."

I don't know why, but I got nervous. I kept wondering I hadn't made a mistake in not speaking to the Emigger about the man, and wondering what on earth would happen if he really should be Pinkey Sanger. In a few minutes Ike Peters came into the office.

"Hello, Ike," said Mr. Bashford. "How does your corporosity seem to sagaciate?"

"Fair to middling," Ike replied. "Say, where's that partner of yours?"

"Colquhoun? Just gone away on a little trip. Why?"

"Nothing. Only there's a fellow down at the hotel that wants to see him, I guess."

"You guess? Don't you know?"

"Well, he didn't exactly say. He's been asking a lot of questions about Colquhoun, though, and when I told him Colquhoun was in the *Chronicle* office, he seemed surprised, and said he just came by here and didn't see him."

"What's his name?"

"Didn't ask him."

"You didn't? First time you failed. Usually you would have asked a stranger his name that soon after meeting him. And you would

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

have asked where he came from and when he left there, and what was his business, and how long he would stay—”

“Oh, get out, Mr. Bashford!”

“And then you’d have wound up by asking him, if it was a fair question, to tell you how much he made.”

“You know better’n that.”

“What does he look like?”

“Got a bull-dog face—looks as if he was going to say ‘Bow! Wow!’ all the time.”

“Well, why didn’t you tell the man to come and see me. Maybe he wanted some printing done.”

“Did tell him you was Colquhoun’s partner, but he said he didn’t care anything about that.”

“Well, if you see him again, tell him Colquhoun will be home Sunday.”

“All right, Mr. Bashford. Say, got any fine-cut?”

“What’s that in front of you on the desk?”

“Thank you.” And Ike went out. And he hadn’t more than got away from the door till Flora Beavers and Annie Davis came in. I was surprised to see them, and they seemed a little bit bashful about coming in, too.

“Come right in, ladies,” Mr. Bashford said, getting up and pushing a couple of chairs out for them. “This is an unexpected, but a highly

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

appreciated, pleasure. What can the palladium of the people, otherwise known as a free and untrammelled press, do for you?"

He turned his head then and dropped his chew of fine-cut into his waste-basket, but Miss Beavers saw him do it.

"Ah, Eli!" she said, shaking her finger at him. "What did I tell you?"

Then she got very red and looked at Annie. I knew what made her blush. She had called Mr. Bashford "Eli," and was afraid Annie had noticed it. But Annie was looking all about the office, as if she were curious to see what was in it. I knew why she was looking around, too. She wanted to see the Emigger.

Miss Beavers began talking right away about a notice the missionary society wanted, to cover her confusion, but it was funny to hear her calling him "Mr. Bashford" one minute and "Eli" the next, and getting more and more rattled every time.

"We shall be only too happy to print the notice, Miss Beavers," Mr. Bashford said. "My esteemed partner and associate in the literary field is, unfortunately for him, absent at this moment, and I know he will be overcome with regret when he learns that our dull and dingy sanctum has been illumined by the presence of two such fair young—"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Oh, Mr. Bashford," Miss Beavers said, "you are such a flatterer!"

"I'm poetical, you know," he replied, looking at her with his head on one side, and with the same expression he had the night I heard him propose to her. She smiled knowingly at him, then asked where Mr. Colquhoun was.

"He has gone away."

"Gone?" Annie asked, as if she couldn't believe it.

"Yes, but not forgotten," Mr. Bashford told her. "He has gone to the wilds of Kensington to trail the advertiser to his lair. He will return, I trust, in good season, and be permitted to attend divine services as usual."

"Eli, you are positively sacrilegious," Miss Beavers said.

"Hear her calling me by my first name," he said to Annie, "as if I were a little boy. I declare, I begin to feel so young that I believe I will join you ladies in your walk, if you will permit me."

"Do. That will be nice," Miss Beavers said.

"Yes, we will be delighted," Annie said.

"But I want to see Johnny print."

She came back to the case where I was while Mr. Bashford straightened his tie and got his hat, and she didn't watch me set type at all. She just looked at me with her eyebrows

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

raised, as if she was asking me something. And I shook my head. Then she joined Mr. Bashford and Miss Beavers, and they went down street.

Oscar came along as I was starting home, and I told him I was going out to Mel Simpson's in the morning, and he said he would go with me. If I hadn't had it knocked out of my head by the way Miss Beavers talked to Mr. Bashford, I would have told Oscar about the strange man, but I didn't think of it at all until after Oscar had left me.

XXV

SATURDAY morning Mr. Bashford gave me the ten dollars to take to Mrs. Simpson, and Oscar and I went out there. Mr. Bashford had told me to be sure to give the money to Mrs. Simpson and to nobody else.

"Mel Simpson," he said, "hasn't got enough sense to suck alum, and can't be trusted with over four cents at a time."

She was glad to get it. I told her it was a present from Mr. Bashford and Mr. Colquhoun, and she asked if they were the preachers in town. She never had heard of either of them, as the Simpsons don't take any papers. But she was awful grateful and thanked us, and said she would make Mel give Oscar and me a bird-dog out of the next litter of pups. After we got back to the office that morning, I told Mr. Bashford about her not knowing who he was, and he said:

"Such is fame. Sic transit glory on Monday. Do something noble, and people are either wondering how you do it or why you

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

do it. Colquhoun and I will have the glow of grace and you boys will get the bird-dogs."

Oscar came to the rear of the office and sat on the stool at the next case to me while I distributed type. He had something on his mind, as usual.

"If I could get over to Sabina," he said, "I believe I could locate that horse."

"What good would that do?" I asked.

"What good does anything do? Don't you suppose I've got any professional pride?"

"But Mr. Colquhoun doesn't want the horse."

"It's his horse, isn't it? Then it is his duty to have it and to take care of it."

"But the horse is well enough off where it is."

"Maybe so, but I'd just like to find it, even if I have to leave it where it is. I would be satisfied if I could prove that I have been on the right trail."

"What about Dr. Milton?"

"I don't care. There was evidence against him, anyhow. But of course I found that he had an alibi, or a habeas corpus, or some of those legal things."

Mr. Bashford came and put some copy on the case, and asked me to get it in type that afternoon if I got time. He said to Oscar:

"Doing much Sherlocking these days?"

"Not very much," Oscar said.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“What has become of The Missing Horse, or the Mystery of the Plaster Footprint and the Fateful Straws?”

“I’m working that out all right now, but Johnny says I might as well let it drop.”

“Don’t give up the ship, Oscar. Old Never-say-die must not be said to have abandoned his efforts under any circumstances.”

Mr. Bashford went out, and Oscar kept on talking about the horse, and what he had read in old man Gillup’s diary, and how he wished he could get his folks to let him go over to Sabina and search for the horse. While he was talking some one came in, but I supposed it was Mr. Bashford and did not look over the top of the case. Pretty soon the person came and stood at the side of the case and said:

“Hello, my young friend. Did you get home with your clothes?”

It was the man with the nipped ear. I was almost scared when I looked up and saw him. Oscar slipped down from his stool and strolled back of the imposing-stone and began fooling with a lot of brass rules and quoins.

“Yes, sir. We got home all right,” I said to the man.

“I suppose there will be no objection to my sitting down here a while and waiting until my friend Colquhoun comes in? I understand

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

he is connected with this paper," the stranger observed, turning and going to the front of the office and taking a chair. I was so rattled I didn't tell him the Emigger wasn't in town. He sat there and looked over the papers. Oscar slipped around beside me and winked mysteriously. He took a stubby pencil from his pocket and scribbled something on a sheet of copy-paper and laid it before me. He had written: "Pinkney Sanger."

I shook my head as if I was in doubt about it, but Oscar rubbed his hand over his hair and touched the tip of his left ear significantly. I had told Oscar long ago about how the Emigger and Pinkney Sanger had had a feud and the result of it. Oscar nodded his head vigorously that it really was Sanger, and I got so nervous I let half a handful of wet type fall into the space-box. Oscar grinned at me. I was worried to death. If Mr. Bashford came in I didn't know what might happen, and then I knew I should have told the man the Emigger was out of town. I was about to do so when he saved me the trouble by coming back to me once more and asking:

"How soon will Dabney be in?"

"I—I don't know," I said.

"Why don't you know?"

"Because he isn't in town."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Not in town? He was in town yesterday. When did he go away?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

The man looked at me so crossly that I was scared. I remembered how Ike Peters had said that he looked as if he was just going to bark, and that was exactly how his face appeared then.

"He left yesterday afternoon, did he?"

I nodded.

"Who told him I was in town?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody? Look here, boy, don't try any monkey-shines with me. You told him I was here and he lit out."

"I didn't tell him anything of the sort. Why should I?"

He looked at me steadily for a minute, and then seemed to believe that I was telling him the truth.

"When will he be back?" he asked.

"I can't tell you."

"When will he be back?" This time he fairly growled it at me. This convinced me that he wasn't there for any good purpose, and I got my nerve back some way.

"I won't tell you."

"So he ran like a scared dog, did he? I'll make him run again if I meet him."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"He did no such thing, and you know it," I answered. "You didn't run him, and you can't run him. I don't know who you are, but that doesn't make any difference. He can whip you and a dozen like you, and I expect he has whipped you before this."

The man doubled up his fist as if to strike me, but he changed his mind apparently, for he began to smile.

"Just a joke of mine," he said, trying to be pleasant. "I really want to see Dabney on important business. Do you think he will return soon?"

"I don't know exactly when he will return," This was true. I couldn't tell to the minute.

"Well, if he comes in, tell him James Lee, from his old home, is at the hotel." Then the stranger went out, first telling me I was a nervy youngster and full of ginger, but that I would have to learn to know a joke when I heard it. After he had gone Oscar took his arm from behind him and showed me a heavy sidestick he had been holding.

"If he had made a move at you I was going to lay him out with this," he said, "and then put him under arrest. I know he is Sanger. I'm going to follow him and see what he does."

Oscar started down street after the man, and I stood in the office door until Marshal

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Smith happened along. I told him about the man, and that I believed he was Pinkney Sanger, and was here to have trouble with the Emigger. The marshal smiled wisely at me and said:

"You've been dreaming things, Johnny. That man is registered as James Lee, and he is going to sell patent churns here. He's been talking about opening an office. I guess he don't aim to hurt nobody."

When Mr. Bashford came in I told him about it and what Oscar and I believed, and he said I was letting my imagination get the best of me. He said the man was kidding me, to see what I would do, and that I shouldn't let Oscar lead me into another mare's-nest, like he did the night he got me to go with him and follow Dr. Milton. This was the first time I knew that Mr. Bashford knew about that episode, and I was so taken back that I couldn't say a word. I began working again, and in a few minutes Oscar came in looking queer.

"Say, Johnny," he whispered, "what do you suppose that fellow did to me?"

I simply looked at him as if to tell him to go ahead.

"I followed him to the hotel, and from there to the depot, and then back up street. He kept dodging around from one street to an-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

other, and every once in a while he would look back at me. Finally he slowed up until I overtook him out by the lumber-yard where there weren't any folks around, and he turned and kicked me a couple of times and said if I followed him any more he'd knock my fool head off. Johnny, he's a bad man, and he's smooth as glass."

While it amused me to think of Oscar's surprise when the man booted him, I was more and more convinced that his actions meant something. And I wished there were some way for me to get word to the Emigger. All afternoon I worried about it and jumped a little bit every time any one came into the office. The stranger didn't return at all, however, and Oscar, who had been keeping his eyes open, said he hadn't left the hotel since noon, except to go and meet the two trains that came in. The Emigger didn't come home on the six o'clock train from Kensington, so I concluded he must have missed it and would probably drive up. I went to Mrs. Lancaster's and left a note for him telling him about the stranger and urging him to be careful. Mrs. Lancaster said she would give it to him as soon as he came. She laid it on the mantel, under a vase filled with paper lamplighters, and I suppose it is there yet if she hasn't cleaned

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

house, for she never gave it to him. I stayed at the office till nine o'clock that night, and then made another trip to Lancaster's, but the Emigger had not returned. From there I walked down as far as the depot and then came back in front of the hotel. The strange man was sitting in front smoking.

"Hello, boy," he said. "Colquhoun home yet?"

"No, sir."

"Huh! And I'll bet money he doesn't come back. Just like him to fool me that way."

He laughed as if he was joking, and got up and went inside. I went on home, and there I told pa about the matter, but he said Oscar Ferguson had filled me up with so much of his detective nonsense that I was getting foolish.

Next morning—Sabbath—after breakfast I wanted to go over to Mrs. Lancaster's, but pa wouldn't let me. He said if I had any word for the Emigger I could tell it to him after church. So I had to get dressed and ready for church. The Emigger was there when we arrived, and I certainly felt better to see him. I hadn't slept much for imagining all sorts of things that might happen, and when I did get to sleep I dreamed a regular nightmare about the Emigger being chased by a mule that kept yelling that it belonged to Colonel Tobe Sang-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

er's grandfather. I awoke in a sweat and trembling all over. During the services I happened to look towards Oscar. He was winking his eye and jerking his head sideways for me to look out of the window. I looked, but couldn't see anything more than usual, so I raised my eyebrows at Oscar. He looked queerly at me, then ducked down and got his hat and tiptoed out. At the door he looked back and motioned with his head for me to follow him. Pretty soon I stooped down and got my hat, although ma tugged at my sleeve. I didn't pay any attention to her, just took my hat and edged to the aisle and tiptoed out as if I had been taken sick, or something like that. I tried to look pale.

At the door, outside, I met Oscar. He had his finger on his lips and started down the steps and down street.

"Don't give yourself away," he said, beneath his breath, "but look behind that big oak-tree alongside the church."

I pretended to rub some dust out of my eye, and looked, and there stood that stranger. I was sure it was Sanger by this time. He was hiding back of the tree, practically, and watching the church door. Just as I looked he turned and saw us and started towards us. We ran. He didn't follow us. We ran for a

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

block, then doubled the corner and came around the other way and watched him. He was still standing back of the tree and watching in all directions.

"What is he up to, do you suppose?" I asked.

"There's going to be trouble. Look how he holds his hand in his pocket."

He had his hand in a side-pocket, and I could see what looked to be the butt of a revolver sticking out beyond his hand.

"He's after the Emigger," I said.

"Let's go and tell Marshal Smith."

"No. I know what to do. The Marshal would be afraid to tackle him. I'm going to get the Emigger's revolver for him."

I slipped away and ran to the office, and there, of course, I found the door locked. I might have known that. I have one key to the door, but it was at home in my other pants. I ran home as fast as I could, and when I left the house with the key I could hear the people at church singing the last psalm. I would have to hustle or it would be too late. I remember thinking as I flew along the street of how peaceful and good everything seemed, with the music of that psalm floating out into the air and the sunshine brightening the red-and-yellow leaves of the trees. It was hard

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to imagine that there could be men in such a beautiful world who would lie in wait for others to do them harm. I got into the office, pulled open the top drawer of the Emigger's desk, grabbed the revolver, and ran out, without stopping to lock the door. There was no time for that.

Up street I sped as hard as I could run. At Jordan's grocery I almost ran over Lafe Skidmore and Ike Peters, who were loafing there discussing something. I bumped into Ike and knocked him against Lafe, and the two of them stumbled and fell against the side of the building. As I went on, Ike yelled:

"Hi, you dadgummed little fool! What you tryin' to do? Kill some one?"

"Where you goin' with that gun?" Lafe shouted.

I did not answer. I was too near winded. Already I had a pain in my side that you get when you run too far and too fast with your mouth open and get out of breath. They say if you keep running the pain will stop and you will get your second wind. I heard the footsteps of Lafe and Ike as they ran up street after me.

When I turned off the pavement and dashed up the walk to the church door, I heard the rustle of dresses and hum of voices, which told

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

me that the congregation had been dismissed. Sanger saw me running and shouted at me, but I took the steps at a leap and scared Orphena Green out of a year's growth when I met her as she was coming through the lobby with Mrs. Anderson. She shrieked and held her hand to her heart, and looked like a frightened chicken. But I kept on, and almost fell into the bunch of people that was coming from the pews.

XXVI

I GUESS I must have looked crazy bursting into the church with that big revolver in my hand. People jumped away from me and exclaimed different things, and asked what in the world was the matter, but I tore through the crowd towards the Emigger.

"Pinkney Sanger is out there ready to way-lay you!" I said, putting the revolver in his hand. "He's hiding back of the big oak-tree."

"Who? What, Johnny?" he asked. Miss Beavers lifted her hands and gasped at sight of the revolver; Mr. Bashford started towards the Emigger; Annie Davis was a little way behind him, and I saw her turn white. The other people stood in their tracks, too dumfounded to move.

"He's out there now," I went on. "I saw him and ran and got your gun. Look out for him."

"I think Johnny is somewhat excited," the Emigger said to those near us. "I will step out and see what may be wrong."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I was so worked up I didn't know what I was doing. It was my place to have stayed inside the church, but when the Emigger started out I ran ahead of him, saying:

"I'll show you where he is."

"No! No! Johnny, come back here!" the Emigger cried, but I was already at the door, and he ran out right behind me.

"You had to tell him, you little devil!" shouted Sanger. "I'll get you first!"

Bang! A streak of fire blazed out from beside the oak-tree and something hot flashed through my right shoulder. I rolled over and over down the steps, and when I reached the bottom I tried to get up, but couldn't. I felt all gone inside, and could just sit against the lower step and watch the Emigger coming down. He was bareheaded, and his big revolver was in his hand. He ran down the steps to me, and bent over me and said:

"My God! Did he get you?"

"In the shoulder, I think," I answered. "It don't hurt."

For the first time since I had known him the Emigger swore. Some way it did not sound wicked, because he swore in a whisper, and then said:

"I'll make him pay for this. Get up, Johnny, and let me take you inside."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Bang!

Another streak of fire from beside the tree, and a lock of hair flew off of the Emigger's head. He straightened up and ran down the walk to the gate. In the church door I could see a lot of people huddled together, looking out as if they could not yet understand what was going on. My mother pushed her way through the crowd and started to come to me, but Mr. Bashford took her by the arms and pushed her back. Then he started out, but Miss Beavers threw her arms around his neck and said he must not go.

"Let go of me, Flora," he said. "I'll be right back as soon as I get Johnny."

Then I heard the Emigger talking.

"Come out from behind that tree, Pink," he said. "Come out. I'll give you a fair fight."

"You've got two more loads than me," Sanger answered. "You've got the advantage now."

One of those shots Sanger didn't have had hit me, and the other had cut the lock of hair off the Emigger's head.

"You've had two shots to his none," I tried to say, but couldn't talk very loud. The Emigger pointed his revolver in the air and shot twice.

"Come out," he said. "That sets us even."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Sanger jumped from behind the tree and shot as he ran towards another tree. The Emigger stood there, smiling calmly, and when Sanger turned to see what he was doing, the Emigger brought his revolver up and blazed away as quick as lightning. Sanger stopped and jerked his left hand to his right ear.

"Nipped your other ear, Pink!" the Emigger laughed. "Always wanted to make you look like you weren't lop-sided."

Bang! Bang!

Sanger shot twice at him and swore dreadfully. I saw the Emigger waver a little bit, and noticed that his left arm dropped as limp as a rag. I was afraid he had been hit. Then, suddenly, his eyes began to blaze, and he began biting his mustache.

"Seems like I've got to do it, Pink," he called. "But I don't want to."

Sanger shot at him again, and at the same instant the Emigger's gun began to spit fire. Bang! bang! bang! Sanger's right arm crumpled in the air and wobbled at his side, and his pistol fell to the ground. He bent over to get it, and the Emigger shot him again, this time in the leg, for his right leg buckled under him and he sagged to the ground. The Emigger ran to him and got his revolver and said:

"Got enough?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Sanger didn't answer.

"Got enough? Or do you want me to beat your brains out with your own gun? It's coming to you!"

From the way the Emigger looked then, it would have taken a mighty brave man to attempt to stop him, but Mr. Bashford came down the steps rapidly and ran towards them. He caught the Emigger's hand and said:

"Don't, Dabney! Don't!"

"No, don't, Dab," Sanger said, faintly. "I've got enough."

And then I realized for the first time that I was sitting with my head against ma's shoulder and that she was crying and praying at the same time.

"I'm all right, ma," I said. "Don't worry about me."

"My poor boy! He is killed!" she said. "He is all over blood!"

And just then I saw the Emigger slip from Mr. Bashford's hands and fall headlong across Pinkney Sanger.

"Tell Doc Henderson to come here!" Mr. Bashford cried. "These men are dead, I believe."

Dr. Henderson hurried down the steps, but Annie Davis ran ahead of him and lifted the Emigger's head into her lap as she sat beside

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

him. She took her handkerchief and wiped his forehead and sobbed:

“Look up, Dabney! Look up! Are you dead?”

The Emigger’s eyes came open slowly, and he forced a smile as he saw her face above his, and answered:

“Not—dead—yet. Unless—you’re—an—angel.”

They carried me into the church and laid me on a bench in the lobby, then brought the Emigger in and wanted to lay him down, too. But he objected. He sat in a big chair while Dr. Henderson cut his sleeve off and found that the bullet had broken his arm. I wasn’t hurt very much. The bullet that got me had simply passed through the muscles on the edge of my shoulder. Dr. Henderson tied a handkerchief around my wound, and said he would dress it properly when I got home. Then he sent to his office for some splints and set the Emigger’s arm. Annie Davis stood around and handed the doctor things as he needed them.

“You’re a first-rate nurse, Miss Davis,” the doctor said.

“Yes,” the Emigger remarked. “It’s worth while to be hurt under the circumstances.”

They had brought Sanger in and laid him

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

on another bench. He was shot up pretty much. Three bullets had landed in him besides the one that nipped his right ear. One was in his right arm near the shoulder, another had grazed his side, breaking a rib, and another had landed in his right thigh. Dr. Henderson said he'd better be taken to his bed at the hotel.

The Emigger, after his arm was fixed, went over to Sanger and said:

"Pink, I'm mighty sorry this happened. I hoped it never would, after I came away to avoid it."

"I've got enough, Dab," Sanger said, weakly. "I've got enough. I was a fool to follow you, but I thought you weren't game. I'll—I'll call it quits, if you will."

"All right, Pink," said the Emigger.

"And I'll shake hands with you on it," Sanger continued, "as soon as my right arm gets well. Say, boy"—to me—"you've got grit."

I smiled foolishly, I think.

"Grit?" asked the Emigger. "That boy is carved out of sandstone and granite."

"Mr. Colquhoun," ma said, "the doctor says you must be quiet for a few days, so you must come to our house until you get well."

He objected, but she insisted so hard that

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

he accepted. A carriage came up to take Sanger to the hotel. I felt sorry for him. He hadn't any friends. The people stood around and watched while we all left. Mr. Bashford took the Emigger and me home in Beavers' carriage. Oscar came to the carriage when we had been helped in, and asked Mr. Bashford:

"What do you think of old Never-say-die's theories now?"

"I owe you a sack of peanuts, Oscar," Mr. Bashford replied, with a grin.

And so it was Pinkney Sanger, sure enough. Dr. Henderson had to work over him a long time at the hotel before he had him fixed up properly. After attending to Sanger he came to our house and dressed my wound. It wasn't anything, though, no more than a cut finger would be. But you would have thought, to hear my folks and other people talk about it, that I had been through a war. Dr. Henderson said that Sanger was sorry now that he had come here.

"I should think he would be," Mr. Bashford observed. "I know I'd have a full meal of vain regrets if I had been punctured as often as he has."

Dr. Henderson had talked with Sanger, and Sanger had told him all about how he hap-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

pened to come here. Branthorpe was at the bottom of it. Branthorpe had learned of the Emigger's feud with Pinkney Sanger from Mr. Gooch, the manager of that show company. After Branthorpe got out of town so fast, he wrote to Sanger and told him where the Emigger was, and also told him that the Emigger was always boasting about having whipped him and having scared his whole family so much that they were afraid to travel on the big road. Of course this made Sanger mad, and he started after the Emigger. And being in a strange part of the country, he went about finding the Emigger in a very cautious way, and that was how I happened to discover who he was. Or maybe it was Oscar who discovered his identity. I can't decide that yet.

Nearly everybody in town came to our house that afternoon, but none of them got to see the Emigger or me except a few that we didn't mind. Dr. Henderson had ordered us to be as quiet as possible. Town - Marshal Smith came up along in the middle of the afternoon and wanted to know if the Emigger would swear out a warrant against Sanger.

"What for?" the Emigger asked.

"Shootin' at you, of course."

"Don't see how I could. He could prove that I had a weapon and he shot in self-defence."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“But somebody ought to be arrested. Can’t overlook this thing of two people blazin’ away and raisin’ Cain right in front of the church—an’ Sunday mornin’, too.”

“Well, go and see Pink. Maybe he’ll swear out a warrant on me.”

“No. He’s the one that ought to be arrested. By ginger, I’ll bet you this shootin’ wouldn’t have happened if I’d been there! The idea! Shootin’ that way right in front of the church—an’ Sunday mornin’, too.”

“Why don’t you pinch them all for Sabbath-breaking?” Mr. Bashford asked.

“Well,” the Marshal said, starting out, “I’ll see what’s to be done under the law, but if I’d been up there when this thing happened, it wouldn’t have happened, I can tell you.”

Marshal Smith was a block away when the shooting commenced, and they tell it on him that some one met him going the other way as fast as he could and asked him what was his rush. He said he was going home to get his uniform and then hurry back and stop the fight.

XXVII

MONDAY I didn't have to go to school, because my shoulder hurt me too much. But I was able to go down-town a while in the morning. The Emigger wanted to go, but Dr. Henderson told him he must not, that complications might set in and cause him to be seriously ill. So the Emigger grumbled a good deal, and smoked and read while sitting in a big chair at our house.

Everybody in town was telling what he did while the shooting was going on, if he had happened to be there, or what he would have done if he had been on the spot. Ike Peters and Lafe Skidmore had an audience all day in front of Jordan's grocery. They told their story over and over until they both got hoarse. They would begin with the moment I ran into them while I was taking the revolver up street, and then would tell the story together.

"I knew there was something up the way that boy was hitting the ground with his feet," Ike would say, and then Lafe would cut in:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“So did I, and when I saw that big pistol in his hand I says to myself, says I, there’s going to be trouble in this town before another hour, and then—”

“And then,” Ike would take it up, “Lafe and me got up and untangled ourselves off the grocery steps, where we fell when Johnny bumped against us, and we struck out after him—”

“Him a running like a whitehead,” Lafe would say, and Ike would go on:

“And we asked him what was the matter, but he never said a word, and we followed him, and when—”

“When we got to the church-yard this here fellow Sanger jumped from back of a tree and pointed a young cannon at us, and—”

“And Ike he got behind a tree, but I—”

“Didn’t do nothing of the sort. You got behind the tree, and I says to this fellow Sanger, says I, ‘What’s the matter here?’ And he—”

“He told us to get out of there or he’d let daylight into us—”

“So we run across the street and stood back of Tom Madden’s woodshed and watched, and first thing we knew the war was on. I was for going over and grabbing Sanger, but Lafe he—”

“No such thing. I started to go and hold him, but Ike pulled me back!”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“And then we saw that Thompson boy lay-in’ at the foot of the steps, and this here editor fellow, Colquhoun, standing with his pistol drawn, and daring Sanger to—”

“Looked as unconcerned, by ginger! as if he was invitin’ Sanger to take a seegar.”

“And then bingety-bang-bing! all over the church-yard, and bullets zippin’ and singin’ in my ears, an’—”

“An’ Ike he laid down on the ground an’ made hisself as flat as he could, but I—”

“Huh! You said you’d whip me for draggin’ you into such a place—”

And so they would go on, over and over, getting so mixed up in their stories that nobody could make head or tail of what they told, and, as Mr. Bashford said, it began to look as if Ike and Lafe were suffering from intellectual blind staggers.

“Well, Johnny,” Mr. Bashford said to me, when Oscar and I went into the office after standing around in front of Jordan’s and listening to Ike and Lafe for a while, “how do you feel after your blood-and-thunder, wild-and-woolly, Kit-Carson-and-Jesse-James experience of yesterday?”

I told him I was all right, except that my shoulder was painin’ me a little now and then.

“How’s Colquhoun?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"He says he is able to come down to business, but Dr. Henderson won't let him."

"That's right. He ought to rest up now. Well, Oscar, alias Old Never-say-die, why aren't you at school?"

"Why, I declare, Mr. Bashford, I forgot all about school."

He had. He had been so interested in talking with me about the fight, and telling me what he saw of it, that he never thought at all about going to school. As I couldn't do any work, he and I went down to the hotel to find out how Sanger was. He was not as bad off as they expected he would be, and the doctor had said that he would be able to be out in a little while. And while we were in the hotel office, Orphena Green and Mrs. Anderson came in and asked if there was anything they could do for Mr. Sanger.

"The poor, misguided man," Orphena said. "I am so sorry for him, even if he has done wrong. Just think of his having to suffer here, all alone, away off from his friends and loved ones!"

"It is our duty to succor him," Mrs. Anderson said. She had brought some jelly for him. Sanger sent back word that he thanked them and would be glad to see them, and Oscar and I went up to his room with them.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Hello, boys," he said to us, after bidding the ladies good-morning. "I'm glad to see you. You surely are a plucky pair."

He didn't look so bad, laying there. His face was white and there were lines of worry in it; and now that his anger had gone, he did not have so much of a bull-dog look. His head was tied up in a bandage, owing to his ear having been shot, his arm was in a sling, and he could not move very much. When Orphena and Mrs. Anderson told him why they had called, he seemed very glad. They offered to do anything they could for him, and said if he did not mind they would drop in once or twice a day to read to him, or bring him some dainties to eat. This pleased him greatly.

I told Mr. Bashford about it afterwards, and he didn't like it.

"Did they go to your house to see Colquhoun?" he asked. I told him they didn't. He said several things about them that they would not like to have me repeat, then he chuckled:

"I guess if Orphena reads some of her poetry to him he will think that his punishment is only beginning."

When I went home for dinner Annie Davis was there. She had brought some chicken broth and preserves for the Emigger, and he

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

was eating them with relish. Annie and ma were sitting talking with him. He said:

"I almost wish Pink had spoiled my right arm, too, so you'd have to feed me."

That afternoon there was a great deal of talk that Sanger ought to be put under arrest. Nobody had made any move of that sort yet, and as it was known that the Emigger would not swear out a warrant for him, a lot of the tougher element in town began muttering that Sanger should be taught a lesson.

"What right has he got to come here and shoot at everybody?" Mart Bean asked, looking around at the men who were hanging about the livery-stable. Now, Mart Bean puts in about half his time in the workhouse, and it sounded funny to hear him talking about any one breaking the laws. But with that start the talk grew worse, and by night it was evident that there was something up.

At supper pa said that there was a good deal of suppressed excitement down-town, and that he had heard that a number of men from the towns around here were coming in, and that a lot of the riffraff were drinking and talking loud about what they intended to do. He said Marshal Smith should appoint deputies to be ready for trouble, but maybe, after all, it would end up in talk.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

I had been asleep a good while when I heard some one pounding on our front-door, and then heard pa go and open it. Mr. Bashford's voice came from the outside.

"There's trouble down-town," he said.

"What is it?" pa asked. Then I heard the Emigger getting up and going through the hall.

"A gang of rowdies from Kensington and other places, and a lot more of the same kind here, are gathering back of the saloons. I think they mean mischief."

"What kind of mischief?" the Emigger asked.

"I'm afraid they are planning a lynching-bee."

I jumped out of bed then and dressed as well as I could with one arm. I heard pa trying to induce the Emigger to go back to bed, but he would not. He said if pa and Mr. Bashford didn't help him on with his clothes, he would go down street as he was. By the time he was dressed I was ready. I knew better than to try to go along with him, so I waited, and after they were gone I promised ma that I would run home at once if there was any trouble, and went out. I trotted over to Ferguson's, and when I got there pa and Mr. Bashford and the Emigger were coming away from the house with Mr. Ferguson. In a minute Oscar slipped

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

out. I whistled softly and he joined me. As we hurried down street neither of us said a word. We could see the flicker of torches down near the hotel and could hear men shouting and swearing.

There were about fifty men in a group in front of the hotel. They had on masks made of handkerchiefs with holes cut in them, and you couldn't tell who they were. One man had a clothes-line over his arm, and with him stood three or four who had a long pole on their shoulders.

"Open the door!" some one yelled.

"Open the door or we will break it in!" another cried. Oscar and I got into a yard across the street and hid behind some bushes. We saw the Emigger and Mr. Bashford and pa and Mr. Ferguson and four or five others circling around the crowd to get between it and the hotel.

In a minute Town-Marshal Smith appeared against the door, on the step. The light from the torches flickered upon him. He had his badge pinned on the outside of his coat, and he looked very white.

"In the name of the law," he said, when there was a little bit of silence, "I command you to disperse at once."

"Go chase yourself," somebody yelled.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“To hell with the law!” some one else yelled. It was Mart Bean’s voice.

“Get out of the way, Smith,” another voice said. “We want Sanger, and we’ll have him.”

“Go to your homes,” the Marshal replied, “or I will place you all under arrest.”

They all laughed hoarsely at this and yelled and shouted swear words and taunts at the Marshal. Then the man with the rope and the men with the pole pushed their way straight through the middle of the crowd towards the door.

“Get away, Smith!” they yelled. “We won’t be stopped. You’ll get hurt!”

They threw the Marshal to one side, and then the men with the pole set it on their shoulders and ran with it against the door. Crash! It bounced back and fell to the ground, but the door did not give.

“Hit it again! You’ve sprung it!” some one called.

They started at the door again, when another man leaped up on the step in front of them. It was the Emigger. His left arm was in a sling across his breast, but his right arm was pointed straight out at them, and in his hand was his revolver. The crowd fell back a little.

“What does this mean?” he asked.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"We're going to lynch the man that shot you!"

"What right have you to take up my fight?"

"Knock him off the step, boys!" some one cried, and there was a movement towards the Emigger, but he swept his revolver around in front of him and shouted:

"Come a foot nearer me and I begin shooting!"

They dropped back again and muttered among themselves. Finally some one of them said:

"You haven't any right to interfere in this."

"But I have. We don't want any of this kind of work here. I'm able to handle my own fights, and I say to you that the first man who tries to lay hand on Pinkney Sanger must answer to me. Now, I'll give you five minutes to get away from here."

"Bah!"

I could see that the Emigger was wavering a little, but he leaned against the jamb of the door and let his revolver swing at his side. He said nothing more, and the crowd stood and watched him oddly for a minute or two. Then the ones at the rear of the crowd began slipping away quietly. One by one they changed their minds and stole off, until at last the men with the pole dropped it from their shoulders,

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

and the man with the rope let it fall to the ground, and they were all gone. Then along the building beside the Emigger I saw Mr. Bashford and pa and Mr. Ferguson and a few other men. They had been ready to help him.

"I guess it's all over," he said, and dropped his revolver into his coat-pocket. Some of the men said they would stay there to guard the hotel, and they were let into the office in the dark. Then pa and Mr. Bashford and the Emigger started home. It was nearly morning by this time. Oscar and I walked up street about half a block behind them, and we could see that the Emigger was leaning against pa and Mr. Bashford. When they reached our house they almost had to carry him inside. I went in, and found that they had laid him on the lounge, and he looked very sick.

"You dressed, Johnny?" pa said, looking at me. "Run right down to Dr. Henderson's and tell him to come here at once."

The doctor came, and stayed with the Emigger until daylight. He had a high fever and was out of his head part of the time. Dr. Henderson said it was a fool trick to take him out at that time of night with his wound, and that he was in for a spell of sickness, he was afraid.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Next morning there was more excitement than ever, but around our house things were very quiet. The Emigger had to be kept in bed, and he was so delirious that he didn't know anybody. Before noon I was sick, too, with a high fever, and I had to go to bed. I made them let me lie on the lounge, after it had been moved into the room with the Emigger.

XXVIII

BY noon of Tuesday I was getting better, and was able to eat something, although ma wouldn't let me have any cake or pie, both of which I craved. Mr. Bashford was at our house nearly all morning, sitting beside the Emigger and trying to talk to him, but the Emigger was as crazy as he could be. One minute he would be talking about people and things none of us ever heard him mention, and the next he would be going over again incidents that had happened since he came here. During the morning Squire Davis came in to ask about him, and later on Judge Lambert came and sat in the parlor and talked with ma and Flora Beavers. Ma said afterwards that while Judge Lambert might be an infidel and a very wicked man for that reason, she was bound to say that he was one of the kindest-hearted men she ever knew, and certainly must have some good in him or he wouldn't be such a friend of Mr. Colquhoun's. Dr. Henderson called just

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

after noon, and felt the Emigger's pulse and shook his head quietly.

"Medicine won't do him much good," he said.

"Why, you don't mean it's that bad?" Mr. Bashford whispered, and from where I was I could see that he almost had tears in his eyes.

"Oh, it isn't so doubtful as all that," Dr. Henderson answered. "But it is evident that this man is not only wounded and ill, but lonesome."

"Everybody in town is his friend," Mr. Bashford answered, taking up the Emigger's hand as if he thought the Emigger knew he was doing it. "Everybody."

"Yes, but a man may be lonesome for all that. I fancy that something has been weighing upon his heart—possibly he has been homesick. Grown men are homesick oftener than they will acknowledge."

"If that is the trouble," Mr. Bashford said, "we'll have the right medicine for him by night."

Dr. Henderson came over to me and said I was doing all right, but mustn't go out of the house any more until he gave me leave. Mr. Bashford kept his position at the side of the Emigger's bed, and every once in a while he smiled quietly to himself.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Is there anything I can do?" Annie Davis asked, coming in.

"I believe nothing at present," Mr. Bashford answered. "He seems to have fallen into a doze."

Annie came across the room and sat down by my lounge. She put her hand on my forehead and asked how I was feeling. I told her I was all right.

"I surely hope you are—that both of you are, Johnny," she said. "I pray for both of you many times a day."

I was astonished to see that she was crying. Why she should have cried was more than I could imagine. But one or two tears splashed down on my hand, and then she put her face in her handkerchief and sobbed.

"Why, what can be the matter, Annie?" Mr. Bashford asked, coming to her.

"I am so miserable," she told him. "When I think that it is all on my account that this terrible thing has happened, I feel like a criminal."

"But it isn't on your account, girl. It isn't your fault."

"It is. I was a foolish girl last spring, wasn't I? And if Mr. Colquhoun had not so bravely resented that man Branthorpe's actions towards me all this would have been avoided."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Now, now—don’t feel that way. It would all have happened anyway, Annie.”

But she would not be satisfied with that, and kept on crying, and got up and walked out into the parlor, where ma and Flora sat.

“Girl, girl!” I heard ma say. “What in the world—?”

Annie told ma, between sobs, the same that she had said to Mr. Bashford. Ma soothed her and petted her, and Flora Beavers talked with her, and between them they finally got her quieted.

“But I will stay here and nurse them both, if you will let me, Mrs. Thompsen,” Annie said.

“Now, we can get along, Annie. You will just wear yourself out.”

“If I do it will not be any more than I deserve. It is the least I can do to repay Mr. Colquhoun—and Johnny, too—for what they have done for me.”

She said she had told her father and mother what she intended doing, and that they agreed with her that it was right she should do it, if ma would permit her. So ma said, of course, if that was the case, Annie was welcome to give whatever help she chose. Of late ma had begun to think a good deal more of Annie than ever. I had heard her talking with pa about Annie, and saying that her experiences seemed

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

to have brought out all the good that was in her. "And goodness knows," ma had said, "there never was any bad in Annie. Just a little foolishness, that came from never having been told what sort of a world this was."

Mr. Bashford left before long, and Miss Beavers went with him. Ma went to the porch with them, and they talked for a while there. When ma came back she was smiling and happy, and humming a song. She told Annie to make herself easy, and to give us a drink of water when we wanted it, and that she would finish some work she had started in the kitchen.

Annie came in and sat beside the Emigger and looked steadily at him. Once in a while she would shake her head slowly and sadly, as if she were blaming herself with something. The Emigger opened his eyes and looked at her, but he didn't know her.

"Can I get you a drink, Mr. Colquhoun?" she asked.

"I'll find her," he said, thickly. "I'll find her, Mrs. Davis, and get her to come back to you."

Annie pushed back his hair from his forehead and looked at him again, and asked:

"Don't you know me, Mr. Colquhoun? I'm Annie. I've come home, you know."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"She'll come back, I know, Dr. Milton, if she sees her mother. There are those two boys following us."

He laughed feebly and turned on his wounded arm, then groaned. Annie brought a glass of water and lifted him up and gave him a drink. When he laid back on the pillow he said:

"Thank you. There isn't a finer spring in the mountains than this."

Then he became rambling in his speech again, and talked of the Sangers and of fighting and of horses and of a lot of people that he called by their first names. Then all at once he began talking about Branthorpe. All this time Annie was speaking to him softly, and telling him everything was all right, that he mustn't worry, but should go to sleep. But the Emigger thought he was talking with Mr. Bashford again, and kept saying he wished he didn't have to do it, but now that he was in for it he would go and meet Branthorpe. He went through the pantomime of loading his revolver, and once or twice cracked a joke at me. Then he began laughing in that crazy way again, and talking about how Branthorpe had run.

After that he lay silent for a good while, and appeared to be dozing some more. Pretty soon, though, he muttered:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I must go away."

"No, you must stay right where you are. Everything is all right," Annie murmured, stroking his forehead with her hand.

"I'm not fit," he said. "Not fit. It's no wonder she can't respect me even. I'm not fit."

"There, there, now. It's all right," Annie whispered.

"I'll tell her, though. I never ran away yet—away yet. I'll tell her. Annie, won't you listen?"

"I am listening," she said to him, but he was paying no attention to her.

"But just a minute," he went on. "Just a minute — a minute. I'm going away. I know I haven't made a good reputation here, but I—but I—"

"Don't think about it any more now; just go to sleep," she said, quietly.

"I'm going to tell you before I go. You might as well know it. It'll help me—help me. It'll help me afterwards to know you knew it. I love you, and I know I shouldn't say so—shouldn't say so. But I—but I— Look out, Pink! I'll—"

He had raised up a trifle, and then fell back gasping with these words. Annie had slipped her arm under his back and she let him gently

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

back to his pillow. Her eyes were glowing and her cheeks were red as roses. She looked a thousand times happier than when she came in. And as she laid his head down, she bent over him and seemed to be whispering something to him, but her back was to me and I couldn't tell whether she was or not.

The Emigger slept on and on, for an hour or two, and Annie sat beside him, from time to time turning to ask if I wanted a drink or if she could do anything for me. Once in a while ma would come to the door of the room and whisper to ask if we were getting along all right, and each time Annie nodded that we were, and ma tiptoed away again.

It was getting towards the end of the afternoon when I heard some people come through our gate and up the walk. Ma met them at the door, and I heard her saying, "How do you do," as if she were speaking to a stranger. Then she came towards our room with some one, and said:

"Here he is, in here."

The nicest white-haired old lady I ever saw in my life came in and hurried to the Emigger's bed. Annie rose up and was about to say something, but the lady dropped on her knees and kissed the Emigger, and cried:

"Dabney! Dabney! Don't you know me?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

The Emigger opened his eyes and looked at her for a moment in that blank way, then quickly his eyes cleared, and he threw his right arm around her neck and exclaimed:

“Mother!”

Ma was standing back of them, rubbing her hands together and looking pleased; Annie was beside ma, looking bewildered; Mr. Bashford was in the doorway with Flora Beavers, and his face was shining, he was so glad. And Miss Beavers was delighted as the rest of them all put together.

“How did you get here?” the Emigger asked his mother.

“I had a telegram to come, Sunday, from Mr. Bashford.”

“Good old Eli! I wouldn’t have let him alarm you if I had known he intended doing that.”

“I knew it. That’s why I didn’t tell you,” Mr. Bashford said.

“And this is Annie Davis, I am sure,” Mrs. Colquhoun said, walking over to Annie and taking both her hands. “I have heard so much of you in Dabney’s letters. And you are just the sort of a dear, sweet girl I had pictured you.”

The Emigger looked queer when his mother said that, and seemed about to make some

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

kind of an explanation, when Mrs. Colquhoun said:

“And where is the wonderful Johnny?”

“Right over there, mother,” the Emigger told her.

She came over to me and bent and kissed me.

“Mr. Bashford told me all about what a brave boy you were, on the way up from the station. I have to thank you for saving Dabney’s life, my boy.”

“He saved me once, so we’re even, then,” I replied.

Dr. Henderson arrived then, and was greatly surprised at the improvement in the Emigger’s condition, but when he met Mrs. Colquhoun he said he did not wonder at it.

“You are just what he needed, madam,” the doctor said. “You will do him more good than any of my medicine.”

They talked for a while, and finally the doctor said they would get us excited if they kept on, and that would be bad for us. Annie Davis said she would better be going home, as she thought she could do nothing more for us that day.

“I thank you for calling, Miss Davis,” the Emigger said to her. “I must have been asleep when you came in.”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"You were," she answered, looking at him with an odd expression.

When she and Mr. Bashford and Miss Beavers had gone, ma and Mrs. Colquhoun sat down and got acquainted. Mrs. Colquhoun had a soft, slow voice that sounded as if she never got excited or let anything worry her, and she and ma were good friends at once. Mrs. Colquhoun had me tell her all about the shooting on Sabbath morning and the attempted lynching of Sanger. She listened to me quietly, once in a while making the Emigger keep still and not interrupt when I was telling how brave he was, and when I had finished she said:

"And where is Pinkney Sanger?"

I told her, and she said she was sorry for him, and that she would go and see him the next day.

"There isn't as much bad in Pinkney as there was in the others of the Sangers," she said. "I don't blame any one now. The blame for this rests on their fathers and grandfathers."

"And that mule," I suggested, and she laughed and said that the mule must take its share of the blame, too.

Orphena Green and Mrs. Anderson called that evening. They had been at the house

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

in the morning to ask about us, too, but Mr. Bashford had told ma that Orphena was trying to make a heroine of herself by feeding Sanger jelly with one hand and writing poetry about him with the other. Still, it was all right for her to take an interest in him, Mr. Bashford said, for it would be inhuman to allow him to lie there alone.

Ike Peters and Lafe Skidmore tiptoed in to see us after supper, and they told us that Orphena and Mrs. Anderson were more enthusiastic over taking care of Sanger than they had been over the barefoot cure, and that Flora Banford had succeeded in recovering from an attack of nervous prostration long enough to make one visit to the hotel with them.

XXIX

WEDNESDAY morning Mrs. Colquhoun set out for the hotel to see Pinkney Sanger and talk with him. Annie Davis came to our house soon after she had left. She talked with ma a good while in the parlor. I heard ma say:

"Yes, we'll be dreadful sorry when Mr. Colquhoun goes away."

"Is he going away soon?" Annie asked.

"As soon as he is well. Mr. Bashford talked with him yesterday evening a good while, and tried to get him to stay here, but he seems to have his mind made up, and he has asked Mr. Bashford to buy his half of the paper."

"He isn't going away to stay?"

"My, yes. He told his mother he would go back home with her as soon as he was well enough to travel. Mr. Bashford just feels downright bad about it."

"I should think he would," Annie replied. Ma went on to tell how she and pa and Mr. Bashford had argued with the Emigger after

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

his mother had gone to bed, and how they had urged him to stay here, but he positively wouldn't.

"He appears to think that he made a bad reputation while he was here," ma said, "and that nobody will have much regard for him after this."

"But he is greatly mistaken," Annie said.

"I wish you could get him to believe it."

"And his mother—does she want him to go home?"

"Well, of course she is his mother, and she naturally would be happier if he was with her, or even if she knew he was settled down for good somewhere."

"How is he this morning?"

"Bright as a dollar. Go in, if you like. Johnny is taking a nap, but I think Mr. Colquhoun is awake."

I shut my eyes and didn't say anything when Annie came in. But she didn't stop at my lounge. She went on over to the Emigger's bed and spoke to him. He had been looking out of the window ever since breakfast, and apparently thinking deeply, for he hadn't said much of anything to me or anybody else.

"Good-morning, Miss Davis," he said to her.

"Good-morning. How do you find yourself this morning?"

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Much better, thank you. That’s right, sit down.”

I opened my eyes about half-way and looked across the room at them. I suppose for a second time I am liable to be criticised for this. But I couldn’t help being there, and they knew I was there, and if they didn’t want me to see them or to hear what they said, they could have mentioned it. The truth is, I don’t believe that either of them remembered that I was within a hundred miles of them.

“You are a tonic yourself,” the Emigger said to her. “A sight of you is bound to be of benefit to any man, sick or well.”

I could see that Annie was looking her prettiest that morning. She wore a white shirt-waist that had a lot of fluffy stuff and lace on it, and her hair was done up in her most becoming way. I saw her ear that was peeping from below a wave of her hair grow red.

“You are flattering, Mr. Colquhoun,” she laughed. “But I suppose it is the privilege of an invalid to say pretty things to his nurse.”

“Yes. Are you going to be my nurse?”

“Why, am I not? I was yesterday, surely.”

“Were you here yesterday, before my mother came?”

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Yes. Didn't you know it?" Her voice had a disappointed tone in it.

"Well, maybe I did, but you see, I expect I was rather peculiar yesterday. The most I remember was having a lot of nightmares, and then waking to see my mother."

"You were a little bit delirious at times."

"Then I trust I did not alarm you, or weary you. You should not have put yourself to such a strain."

"Oh, it was a pleasure to do it."

"Then I feel like getting delirious again."

"But you are much better company when you are not that way."

"All right. I'll be rational."

Annie asked him if she couldn't get him a drink, and he said that he was very thirsty, although I knew that he had had a whole glass of water a minute before she came. Then she asked if the window-shade was just right, and he got her to lower it a little. She pulled it down a few inches and he said that was just right. Not long before she came he had complained about it being that low, and said he wanted it up as far as it would go. She smoothed his pillow for him, and he said that made it much better. Ma had smoothed that pillow out for him not such a great while before, and at the time he had objected, telling

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

her he would rather have it rumped. Annie kept bustling around quietly, doing things for him, and I think he drank fully four glasses of water within half an hour. Then she sat down again and said:

"I would read to you, if you wished, but maybe it would waken Johnny."

"All right; just talk to me, then."

I wondered how he could figure it out that her talking to him would make less noise than if she read to him.

"I am sorry to hear that you are going away," she said, seriously, after sitting silent for a few minutes.

"Who told you?" he asked.

"Mrs. Thompson."

"Yes, I think it will be best if I leave here," he said, after a pause.

"But why? You have made so many friends, I should think you would regret going away."

"I know. I have made some wonderfully good friends. But there are reasons why it will be better for me to go."

"We shall all be sorry."

"Yes, for a while. But in a few weeks you will have managed to forget me, save as a wild, reckless fellow who always contrived to find trouble for himself and others."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"You mustn't talk that way. I shall begin to think you are delirious again."

Then neither of them said anything for a long, long time. I opened my eyes cautiously and peeped over at them. Annie was sitting there, looking straight ahead of herself, but the Emigger was looking at her face. I began to wonder if they would stay that way all morning, when Annie asked:

"Do you think people mean what they say when they are delirious?"

"It depends on what they say."

"Mr. Colquhoun, I for one shall be deeply sorry if you go away. I feel that I owe so much to you. You have put me everlastingly in your debt."

"Oh no. I haven't done so very much—"

"But, Mr. Colquhoun—"

"You called me by my first name Sunday morning in the church-yard."

"I know—maybe I did. But I was excited, and frightened, and—"

"Possibly you were delirious," he said, and I knew he was smiling at her.

"I—I— Do people mean what they say when they are delirious?"

"I have hoped you meant to call me 'Dabney.' That would make it easier for me to say good-bye to you."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"Why do you insist on saying good-bye?"

"I have explained all that. You know why."

"No, I don't."

She did, though. I knew she did. She knew she did. And the Emigger knew she did. I would have moved or said something then to let them know I was awake, but I felt as if that wouldn't be giving the Emigger a fair show.

"I can tell you why," he said to her, softly. "Let us suppose a case. Suppose a man comes to a strange town, and there he falls in love with a girl who is so beautiful and so good that he knows he has no right ever to hope that she will care for him. Suppose certain events happen that show him for what he is. Suppose his actions betray how his rash, quick temper has always gotten him into trouble. Suppose he realizes that he has shown himself to be a brawler and a bully—but suppose at the same time that he loves that girl more and more each time he sees her. And suppose that he sits down and reasons it all out with himself. If he is a square man, and an honest man with himself, wouldn't he say to himself that he should go away?"

"And that would be honest with himself, would it?"

"Yes."

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“But would it be honest with her?”

“Why, that is the most honest part of it.”

“But suppose,” she said—and I looked and saw that she was twisting her handkerchief between her fingers—“suppose I was— Oh, it is forward and utterly wrong for me to say it! But suppose I was the girl, and—and—”

“And I was the man?”

“Yes.”

“Then all the more reason why I should go—”

“Oh, Dabney! Dabney! Why don't you tell me to-day? You did yesterday!”

“God bless you,” I heard him say, and then I saw her head was down on his shoulder and that he was whispering to her. I shut my eyes, for my conscience told me I should not look any more. If they saw me looking it would make me feel uncomfortable.

Another long time passed, and I heard Annie say, in a half-whisper that was as glad as anything you ever heard:

“I was afraid you would make me propose to you, you dear, foolish man.”

“I'm glad I lost my head yesterday,” he answered. “I lost my heart so long ago that I needed to lose my head to balance me.”

It was hard work for me to keep on breathing regular and seeming to be asleep, so I

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

tossed once or twice and opened my eyes and yawned.

"Can I get you a drink, Johnny?" Annie asked, coming towards me and straightening her hair.

"Had a good nap, old man?" the Emigger asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Do you mean you want a drink, or you had a good nap?"

Annie laughed.

Before I could answer Mrs. Colquhoun came in, and Annie forgot about the drink for me. She seemed to want to be with Mrs. Colquhoun all the time. The Emigger listened while his mother told about seeing Sanger, and of having made up all the old family feud with him.

"And I stopped and saw that nice man, Squire Miller, on my way home," she said. "Now, listen to me, calling this house home! But it seems as if it were a home for me, you are all so good to my boy."

"It's your home as long as you want to stay, Mrs. Colquhoun," ma said. "That's just the way I like people to feel in our house."

"I thank you. Anybody could feel at home with you. But I was saying I saw Squire Miller. He was playing a tune in the most peculiar manner on a leaf. And I don't know

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

whether I did right or not, but I asked him not to send Pinkney to jail."

"Compounding a felony, mother!" the Emigger chuckled.

"I don't know what it was, but I made the Squire promise that the worst he would do would be to fine Pinkney for shooting a revolver, although he said something about suspending a sentence and letting Pinkney go on peace bonds, or some such legal arrangement. I never could understand these law terms."

"He'll fine Pinkney for shooting, and he'll let him plead guilty to shooting with intent to harm, but he'll let him go on suspended sentence," the Emigger explained. "I knew about it. Bashford said it would be arranged. I couldn't prosecute him, you know."

Mr. Bashford dropped in before very long, and asked how we were getting along.

"Fine, Eli. And say," the Emigger said, "you haven't decided to make that deal with me for my interest in the *Chronicle*, have you?"

"I don't want to, but I will, of course, if I have to."

"Well, forget about it. You don't have to."

Mr. Bashford looked at him, then at Annie, who was blushing and trying to stand in the shadow. Then Mr. Bashford raised his hands and said:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“Bless you, my children. Got your verdict, did you, Dabney?”

The Emigger whispered something to his mother, and she turned to Annie and put her arms around her and kissed her, and called her “daughter.” And then she cried, and Annie cried, and ma wiped her eyes and said if anybody ought to be happy they were the ones.

“And it ’ll be a double wedding,” Mr. Bashford said.

“You and Flora?” ma asked.

“Yes. Flora has consented to take my name for a life subscription to Home and Hearth,” Mr. Bashford answered.

“Then she’s getting the best premium she ever got. All of you stay for supper. I won’t take no for an answer. As soon as pa comes home we’ll have a good chicken supper to celebrate this. Mr. Bashford, you go and get Flora, and Annie, you ask your folks to come, too.”

XXX

“A PRETTY girl to nurse him is the medicine that will make a man get well quicker than anything else on earth,” Dr. Henderson said, when the Emigger was up and around.

“Then why don’t you prescribe pretty girls instead of sections of the Latin lexicons?” Mr. Bashford asked.

“Because pretty girls are never a drug on the market,” the Emigger explained.

Mrs. Colquhoun was well satisfied that the Emigger should stay in Plainville and continue to edit the paper with Mr. Bashford. She was more satisfied than ever when the Emigger and Pinkney Sanger had had a long talk, and had buried the hatchet for good and all. Sanger soon got well enough to sit out in front of the hotel in the sun, and the Emigger would sit with him an hour or so each day and talk about old times. Orphena Green stopped making her sisterly visits to Sanger after he was able to be up. He managed to use a

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

crutch and walk down to her house occasionally, though.

"When a woman gets a man started on the jelly and poetry route it's all up with him," Mr. Bashford said. But Orphena's poems were not the gloomy ones they used to be. She handed one or two to Mr. Bashford every week, and in one of them Oscar discovered a cipher. If you read the first letters of each line, reading straight down, they spelled "Joseph Pinkney Sanger." Her poetry used to run to withered roses, and broken harps, and dead hopes, but now it was about the beautiful moonlight on the sea which ever and ever sings of thee, and the songs of the morning stars, and love, and affairs of that kind.

Orphena gave a dinner at six o'clock one evening in honor, as the item she wrote for the *Chronicle* stated, "of Mr. Joseph Pinkney Sanger, of Red Gap, Virginia, who is spending a few weeks in our midst." She had Annie Davis and Flora Beavers and the Emigger and Mr. Bashford and a few others, and when she invited them, she explained that six o'clock was now considered the most formal hour at which to have dinners.

"I have to have my dinner at noon, just the same," Mr. Bashford said. "I ate as usual at noon to-day." This was the day of Orphena's

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

six-o'clock dinner. "I have a great and undying ambition to go into society, and to do as the four hundred do, but my stomach has no social aspirations, and my appetite insists on the union schedule."

I heard afterwards that the dinner was quite a fine affair, and that Mr. Bashford made a speech, in which he lifted up a glass of grape-juice that Orphena had canned that fall, and proposed a toast which the Emigger said went like this:

"My friends, on this joyous and auspicious occasion, I rise to propose the health and happiness of one of the unhonored and unsung features of every true American landscape. Men have written of love, women have sung of it, and each and all of them have attributed its insidious workings to the influence of a pagan god, or godlet, called Cupid. For once, ladies and gentlemen, legend is disproved and myths are wiped away by the gleaming hand of truth. I ask you to join with me in a libation to the mule! Had it not been for the fact that Colonel Sanger's grandfather's mule kicked Colonel Colquhoun's grandfather — or possibly it was the other way around; you never can tell about mules—anyhow, had it not been for the prescient kick of this mule, this lowly, meek, unconsidered, long-eared and large-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

hearted emblem of industry and enterprise—had it not been for the good-luck sign the shoe of that mule planted upon the person of the ancestor of one of the noble gentlemen now favoring us with their presence, neither of them would be here to-day. There would have been no feud, there would have been no Emigger in Plainville, there would have been no Pink Sanger coming here yearning first for revenge, and then for the gentle touch of a woman's hand; romance would have languished at the shrine of the affections in at least one instance—and I think I am safe in saying in still another instance, or two other instances, for had it not been for the joyous fellowship I have with Colonel Dab Colquhoun, I should not have renewed my youth as the eagle and flown into the flowery field of one woman's smiles. To the mule, the chivalrous mule of Ol' Vah-ginny!"

Mr. Bashford says this is not exactly what he said, but that it is substantially true, at any rate, and expresses his sentiments.

Annie Davis and Flora Beavers were at our house once or twice a day, and all they talked about was dress-making. The double wedding was set for the last of October, and they had to have their clothes ready. Ma got a lot of stuff for them in Kensington one day, and sent

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

me to Davis's with it in the evening. I found Annie and Flora Beavers and Orphena Green surrounded by what looked like a whole dry-goods store of stuff. When I went into the room they grabbed a lot of things and put them away and told me to wait in the hall.

"I suppose it won't be long until you will be having your wedding clothes made, Orphena?" Annie smiled.

"Oh, it will be the first of the year, anyway," Orphena answered, looking as shy as if she weren't over sixteen.

It was decided to have the wedding in our church, so that everybody could be accommodated. Dr. Milton said he would have no objection to their having a piano brought into the church for the occasion, and Lizzie Collins was to play the wedding - march. She began practising it the first of October, and by the time for the wedding she could play it backwards or forwards, and with her eyes shut.

The day before the wedding Oscar disappeared, after coming into the office for a minute and whispering something to Mr. Bashford, who gave him some money. They had been holding mysterious consultations for two or three days. I would have felt slighted over this if it hadn't been for something that happened the week before. Mr. Bashford brought an

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

item back to the case and told me to set it up. It read:

“Miss Flora Beavers and Mr. Eli James Bashford will be married next Wednesday at high noon in the Covenanter Church, the Rev. Dr. Milton officiating. Mr. John Thompson will act as best man.”

“But Mr. Bashford,” I said, “I’m only a boy. I can’t be best man.”

“You’re better than most of the men I know, except Colquhoun, and he can’t very well be my best man, for he is to be married at the same time.”

Yes,” said the Emigger, handing me an item he had written. It was:

“Miss Anna Davis and Mr. Asbury Dabney Colquhoun will be united in holy matrimony at the Covenanter Church at high noon of next Wednesday. The ceremony will be performed by the Rev. Dr. Hugh Milton. Mr. John Thompson will be best man.”

“And I’m to be best man for both of you?”

“Exactly,” Mr. Bashford replied. “It’s the only way we can keep both the girls from rejecting us and waiting a few years to marry you. I believe they both think more of you than they do of us, anyhow.”

When I told ma and pa that I was to be the best man for both couples, they did not act

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

the least surprised, and pa told me to go into my room and look on my bed. There was a fine new black suit, the very kind I always had wanted, for me to wear at the wedding.

On the morning of the day they were to be married, Mr. Bashford and the Emigger were at the office for a little while. I passed the office, going home to get washed up and dressed in my new suit. They called me in.

"Johnny," Mr. Bashford said, "I have a little present for you."

He handed me his old tobacco-pouch. It was empty.

"So that is your sacrifice on the altar of matrimony, is it?" the Emigger asked.

"Yes. I am still to be permitted to smoke, but henceforth fine-cut may never more pass my lips. I don't know how I am going to write anything without my trusty pouch of inspiration at my elbow, but—what has to be has to be."

"And I have a small trinket for you, too, Johnny," the Emigger said, opening his desk and taking out his revolver.

"This is the habit I have been compelled to promise to forsake forever. So I give it to you, pardner, as a memento of the times we have had together."

"Let these things be to you a constant re-

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

minder of two misspent young lives," Mr. Bashford said. "Wait. Let me see if there is a farewell chew in that pouch. Alas, no. I am a Phoenix rising from the ashes of my past."

"And there isn't a cartridge in the gun," the Emigger laughed. "Take them, Johnny, and never use either of them."

I am not going to tell any more how pretty Annie Davis was the day she was married, nor am I going to try to tell how she and Miss Beavers were dressed. I should have said that Emma Wallace was bridesmaid for Annie and Pearl Kirkham for Flora. It was as fine a day as you ever saw. The church was crowded. Squire Miller came up as far as the door, tootling on a locust leaf, and then threw the leaf away before he went in. Judge Lambert and his wife were there; so was Captain McDougal in his Grand Army uniform; old Mrs. Gillup had a front seat at the special request of the Emigger; Professor Jones sat with Mrs. Lancaster and our folks in what are the mourners' seats at funerals. Mrs. Anderson and Flora Banford were away around on one side, and lots of folks from the country that used to know the Emigger when he and I drove the wagon came in in their buggies and carriages. Old Uncle Abijah Henderson hobbled in and sat in one of the back seats.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

"I's fum ol' Vahginny mahse'f," he said, "an' I des was boun' ter come ter de weddin' o' one o' de Colq'houn's. Dey's quality folks, like I useter b'long ter."

Wash Purdy and Lafe Skidmore and Ike Peters came together and slipped into a rear seat. I kept looking for Oscar, but he didn't show up. When Mr. Ferguson and his wife came I asked where Oscar was, and they said he would be along after a while. At noon everybody got quiet. Mr. Bashford and Flora and Annie and the Emigger and the rest of us that were the wedding-party were waiting in the lobby. Lizzie Collins sat at the piano and began playing the march.

"Can you keep step to that, Dabney?" Mr. Bashford asked.

"I hope I never have to try to again," the Emigger said.

He and Mr. Bashford and I walked up the aisle first, then came Emma Wallace and Pearl Kirkham following Annie, who was on her father's arm, and Flora, who was with her mother. I did not know a wedding was such a short affair. They were married before I knew it.

Then, when they started out, everybody crowded around them to shake hands with them and kiss the brides and congratulate them.

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

Lizzie Collins kept playing the march that they were to have gone out by, but they couldn't get out until every one had told them how fine they looked, and how happy they should be. Just as we managed to get nearly to the door Oscar came squeezing through the crowd.

"You got here too late, Oscar," I said.

"Oh, I don't know. Say, Mr. Colquhoun, there's a present for you outside."

"A present?"

Already Beavers' house as well as Davis's was full of presents of different kinds, and it seemed odd that any one would send something to the church. We pushed on through as the people thinned out of the aisle, only to find when we reached the church steps that the whole crowd was standing in the yard and smiling good-naturedly and watching for the Emigger to come out. And then I understood what Oscar had been so mysterious about, and saw what the present was.

"If it isn't old Jeff!" the Emigger exclaimed.

There was the stolen horse, tied to a tree, with white ribbons in bows and rosettes and streamers fastened to its mane and tail, and looped around its neck and fluttering in tassels from its ears. And swung around its neck was a card reading:

THE GENTLEMAN RAGMAN

“With the compliments of E. J. Bashford and Oscar Ferguson.”

Oscar had gone to Sabina, had found the horse, and had brought it home.

“The mystery is unravelled,” Mr. Bashford laughed, “and, Oscar, I want that plaster foot-print for a paper-weight.”

So now I draw the curtain at the close of this strange, eventful history, as Professor Jones would say. I should only add that Orphena Green and Pinkney Sanger attended the wedding, and that Orphena had written a poem that she called an “Epithalamium,” which she wanted to read, but did not get a chance to do so. And Mr. Bashford would not print it in the *Chronicle* that week, because, he said, while it was perfectly true and beautiful, it was too personal. So Orphena says she will keep it until after the first of the year, and then rewrite it to fit another occasion. I remember one stanza of it, which went:

“O happy day! O hallowed spot!
O love forever new!
Four souls with but a single thought,
Four hearts that beat as two!”

THE END

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 923 638 1

PS
3527
N3654g

